

CIA involved with U.S. Iraqi weapons inspection — Rittler

Pilot dies in training flight accident

AMMAN (Petra) — One of Jordan's fighter planes crashed Wednesday morning during a routine training flight, resulting in the death of a pilot, according to a military spokesman. He said the two pilots on board the two-seater jet managed to bail out. One survived while the other, Maj. Naji Abdul Muhdi Habashneh, died upon impacting the ground.

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Israeli embassy employee accidentally shot

AMMAN (J.T.) — An employee at the Israeli embassy was injured on Wednesday when he was accidentally shot by one of his colleagues on the mission's premises, informed Jordanian sources said. The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the employee was seriously injured. The source said Sork Given was hit in the chest and was admitted to the Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery where he underwent an operation to remove the bullet. The source told the Jordan Times that Israeli Ambassador Oded Oran went to the hospital to supervise the treatment of Given. The Jordanian sources said the person who fired the weapon was not immediately available and a statement from the Israeli embassy was expected to be released later Wednesday.

Assad's son to visit Jordan

AMMAN (AFP) — Syrian President Hafez Assad's son Bashar is to visit Amman on Thursday for talks with His Majesty King Abdullah and to present his condolences on the death of King Hussein, a Palace official said.

China air crash kills 61

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese airliner plunged into a farm field and exploded Wednesday several kilometers short of its destination in southeast China, killing all 61 people aboard and gouging a large hole in the ground, state media reported. The crash of the China Southwest Airlines jet shook homes in nearby Tangrou, said villager Zhen Huanlong, who praised the pilot for missing his town and putting the plane down in empty fields. "The ground is covered in blood," Zhen told The Associated Press by telephone. "The house even rattled. It really was very frightening." No foreigners were on the flight from the southwest city of Chengdu to Wenzhou, 1,300 kilometers southeast of Beijing and 400 kilometers south of Shanghai, the Xinhua news agency reported.

Zyuganov says Albright shames women

MOSCOW (R) — The head of Russia's Communist Party said on Wednesday U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had brought shame to all womankind through what he called her unnatural warring. "I am alarmed by this Madame, whom I call Madame War," Gennady Zyuganov told reporters in response to a question about peace talks on the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. "She is a woman, after all. Rattling rocks and bombs — it is simply against nature," said Zyuganov, who controls the largest bloc of seats in Russia's parliament. "I want to say through you [the media] to all the women's organizations of the planet and especially of Europe... She is bringing shame on the entire female sex and the female tribe," he said.

Man charged over Omagh bombing

DUBLIN (AP) — Irish authorities on Wednesday charged their first suspect in connection with the car bombing of Omagh, more than six months after IRA dissidents slaughtered 29 people in the northern Ireland town. Colm Murphy, 48, a building contractor and pub owner, appeared in Dublin's special criminal court — where cases are heard before three judges and no jury — three days after police arrested him at his farmhouse near Dundalk, 80 kms north of Dublin.

Jordan will not be springboard for interference abroad — King

AMMAN (AFP) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday said he would never allow Jordan to be a springboard for interference in the internal affairs of another nation and stressed his desire to strengthen ties with Iran. "We do not allow Jordanian territory to be used as a springboard for interference in the domestic affairs of another country," the Monarch told AFP in a reference to the situation in neighbouring Iraq, in his first interview since becoming King on Feb. 7.

The King also moved to smooth over a policy controversy raised when he was quoted by several foreign newspapers as saying Iran was a "threat" to some Gulf states.

"Iran is a very important Islamic country with whom we have strong and brotherly relations," King Abdullah said.

Iran officially protested over the King's earlier remarks but Jordanian authorities have assured Tehran that his words had been "taken out of context."

"We wish for the strengthening and development of our relations with Iran and with the rest of the Arab World," the 37-year-old King told AFP at Raghadan Palace.

"We may differ on certain subjects, but through a constructive dialogue

we will find common points to develop for the good of our Arab and Islamic peoples," he said.

Relations between the two countries have improved markedly in the past few years, but there are differences, such as over the Middle East peace process.

King Abdullah also moved to dismiss fears for the stability of Jordan following the death of King Hussein.

"The future of Jordan is clear, and one should be suspicious of what is said in the region with the aim of sowing doubt among friends," he said.

When King Hussein died on Feb. 7, Israel expressed fears that Iraq and Syria might take advantage of the situation to destabilise Jordan.

"Jordan is a state based on law with stable institutions which will guarantee its future," he said, paying tribute to the "rare cohesion" which existed between the Jordanian people and his father.

The new Monarch spoke confidently about Jordan's future relations with the whole Arab World.

"We will work to strengthen Jordan's ties with all Arab countries without exception," he said.

He said Jordan would "never vary from the path it has followed" and that he would follow the poli-

cies of King Hussein, who ruled Jordan for 46 years.

"Jordan has always been opposed to any interference in the internal affairs of others, just as it will never allow others to interfere in its own internal affairs," the King added.

On the Middle East peace process, King Abdullah also pledged to follow in his father's footsteps to see the eventual establishment of an independent Palestinian state and peace between Israel and Syria and Lebanon.

"We will continue to offer our Palestinian brothers all means of support to achieve their legitimate goals on their national soil," he said.

He went on to add that he would "spare no effort on all tracks to see peace [between Israel, Syria and Lebanon] based on law and justice."

On the subject of Jordan's relations with the Gulf states which went into temporary decline following the 1990-91 Gulf War, the King said brotherly ties would outlive "occasional differences."

"We will reinforce the coordination and consultation which was never interrupted," he said, praising the expressions of support for Jordan from across the Gulf following King Hussein's death.

"The honourable posi-

tions of those countries' leaders are very much respected and appreciated. They constitute a clear sign of developing relations which makes me very optimistic."

King Abdullah also countered charges of political inexperience, pointing out that he had not simply been a career soldier before he took the Throne, but had been "very close" to his father who entrusted him with "several political missions."

"I always preferred to be on the spotlight, but I'm proud of the Arab and international relations I have woven and I'll work to develop them," he said.

On the domestic front, the King has committed himself to "dialogue" as his main goal but also pledged to "prioritise the fight against corruption and overhaul economic and socio-economic matters."

King Abdullah, who became Supreme Commander of the Jordan Armed Forces when he took the Throne, also explained his recent retirement of 10 top army officers as a "simple reform."

"I wanted to replace them with a younger generation. My decision by no means suggests that I was concerned or that I wanted to clean up the army," he said.



His Majesty King Abdullah receives condolences Wednesday from Saudi Prince Walid Ben Talal Ben Abdul Aziz during a meeting at Raghadan Palace (Petra photo)

King holds talks with chief Islamic justice, Saudi prince

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday received at Raghadan Palace Chief Islamic Justice and the King's Advisor on Islamic Affairs Sheikh Izzeddin Al Khatib Al Tamimi, who briefed the Monarch on Shada Court procedures and the services they provide to citizens.

Sheikh Tamimi voiced appreciation to King Abdullah for the attention and concern he has given to the Sharia Courts. Also Wednesday, King Abdullah received Judicial Council President Taher Hikmat, who voiced the judiciary system's allegiance to the King.

King Abdullah was briefed by Hikmat on the role of the judiciary system in observing

and protecting the sovereignty of law and upholding justice. The briefing also covered means and methods of further developing the judiciary system.

King Abdullah on Wednesday received Saudi Prince Walid Ben Talal Ben Abdul Aziz, who offered his condolences to the King over the passing of King Hussein. Prince Walid also visited the tomb of the late King and recited the first sura of the Holy Koran.

King Abdullah also received several Arab investors and members of the Housing Bank's board of directors, who offered their condolences over the passing of King Hussein.

King Abdullah stressed the importance of economic poli-

cies in developing the private sector and encouraging investment. The King reiterated Jordan's full support and encouragement for Arab investors in economic and development projects in the Kingdom, saying that Jordan will provide the necessary facilities to encourage Arab investment.

Also Wednesday, King Abdullah received cables of condolences from the presidents of Malta, Armenia, and Fiji, as well as from the prime minister of Andorra, the Indian parliament speaker, former International Francophone Organisation Secretary General and former U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and International Muslim Women's Association Secretary General Suad Al Fateh.

Last Jordanian prisoners in Kuwait pardoned

AMMAN (J.T.) — The emir of Kuwait has decided to pardon the last eight Jordanian prisoners held in the Gulf emirate, Jordanian officials said Wednesday.

They said the seven men and one woman are due to be officially released later this week to coincide with Kuwait's national day.

A relative of one of the pris-

oners told AFP that they had already been collected from jail and taken to a deportation centre.

The eight prisoners were the last Jordanians left in Kuwaiti jails after Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah granted amnesty to 13 Jordanians in April 1998.

A date for their return to Jordan was not yet available, and

the Kuwaiti embassy in Amman said it could not confirm the report.

Most Jordanians held in Kuwait were accused of collaborating with Iraqi occupation forces following Iraq's invasion of the emirate in August 1990.

Ties between the two countries deteriorated sharply following the invasion when Jordan was

accused by some countries of supporting Iraq in the conflict.

Jordan's embassy in Kuwait City was closed after U.S.-led forces liberated the emirate in February 1991 and hundreds of thousands of Jordanian and Palestinian workers were expelled from Kuwait.

But relations began to warm a year ago and Kuwait decided to

reopen the Jordanian embassy last month.

A Jordanian official said that the government had not been officially notified of Kuwait's decision but was aware of it through the Kuwaiti press.

Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib is expected to travel to Kuwait soon to reopen the Jordanian embassy.

Turkey calls on rebels to surrender; Greek army on alert

Agencies

TURKISH PRESIDENT Suleyman Demirel urged national reconciliation following the capture of Kurdish guerrilla chief Abdullah Ocalan, but tensions grew with neighbour Greece on Wednesday as Athens put border forces on higher alert.

"Turkey has reached a turning point," Demirel said.

"We must bring our children down from the mountains, for they are our children, misled into terrorism, into committing murders."

"We must do this in a way that does not cause more hurt," he said, referring to the government's call on Kurdish rebels to surrender on promises of a partial amnesty.

Demirel, talking to journalists aboard an aircraft on his way home from a state visit, criticised Greece for secretly harbouring Ocalan on embassy premises in Nairobi for two weeks before his capture by Turkish special forces.

"Whoever supports the killers of innocent people has blood on his hands," he said.

"I say they are not behaving like a civilised country. I say this is hostility."

Newspapers with good contacts to the security organs have carried extracts from what they describe as Ocalan's confession.

They cite him as saying Greece sheltered his Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) and supplied arms, including rockets, for its 14-year fight for Kurdish



Kurdish demonstrators in Berlin Wednesday stand by coffins with the remains of Ahmet Acar, Sema Alp and Mustafa Kurt, who were shot dead while trying to storm the Israeli consulate in Berlin on Feb. 17, during a mourning march of several thousand Kurds living in Germany to commemorate the three victims (AP photo)

self-rule in which 29,000 have died.

A Turkish business group said on Wednesday it would cut trade ties with counterparts in Greece.

Greek government spokesman Dimitris Reppas said Greek forces on the Turkish frontier and islands close to Turkey had been put on higher alert because of declarations from Ankara. But he said he did not expect any incidents.

"We have taken measures of heightened alert in view of any such development — which at

this time we do not foresee."

About 6,000 Kurds marched through Berlin to mourn three Ocalan supporters shot dead while trying to storm the Israeli consulate there a week ago. They were protesting over reports that Israeli intelligence had helped seize Ocalan.

Some 2,000 of Kurds marched through the centre of the Armenian capital Yerevan to demand that Turkey release Ocalan and denounce world reaction to the arrest of the Kurdish rebel leader.

Ocalan from a possible death sentence and to defend the Kurdish cause before the world.

The plea was made public as several thousand Kurds and Italian supporters, chanting slogans and waving banners, marched through Rome to protest against Ocalan's capture.

Some 2,000 of Kurds marched through the centre of the Armenian capital Yerevan to demand that Turkey release Ocalan and denounce world reaction to the arrest of the Kurdish rebel leader.

Brandishing banners declaring "Free Ocalan," and "Turkey, U.S., Israel terrorists," the crowd aimed their invective at the U.S. embassy and the United Nations building in Yerevan.

"Turkey is on fire and if the international community sits by and watches cold-bloodedly as Turkey deals with Ocalan, then this fire will spread and burn in every country," said Sabri Tash, a Kurdish representative to the Caucasus region.

Armenia is home to around 60,000 Kurds and people of Kurdish origin.

Elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, a group of Kurds marched through the Crimean capital Simferopol, chanting "Down with Turkish fascism," and "Free Ocalan."

The widow of French President Francois Mitterrand has asked the leaders of the 15 European Union countries to check urgently on the prison conditions in which Ocalan is being held.

Demirel's comments were accompanied in some Turkish newspapers by pictures of leaflets dropped on mountain areas where Ocalan loyalists may still be hiding, awaiting the spring.

Radical daily published one showing a photograph of a happy wedding scene, the groom, an ex-PKK guerrilla, sitting between his mother and his bride.

"Fahri Entas joined us," the text said. "He joined the village guard, he married his sweetheart and now he is happy!"

Iraq says civilians killed in air attacks outside Baghdad

BAGHDAD (AP) — U.S. and British warplanes attacked targets on the outskirts of the Iraqi capital, killing or wounding several people, the Iraqi armed forces said Wednesday night.

In a separate statement, the Iraqi information ministry accused U.S. warplanes of flying some 20 kilometres beyond the "no-fly" zone, which the Western allies patrol over southern Iraq, towards Baghdad.

Iraqi air defence batteries shot down a missile fired by the U.S. planes, the ministry added, while other American missiles "struck one of our civilian sites, killing and wounding a number of citizens."

The United States military confirmed that its planes had attacked Iraqi air defence sites south of Baghdad.

Neither the Iraqi armed forces nor the information ministry gave precise numbers of casualties and it was not possible to confirm the reports independently.

A military communiqué said 23 "enemy formations" of aircraft from bases in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait carried out a total of 48 sorties "towards the city of Baghdad."

Referring to the U.S. and British "aggressors," the statement said: "Our anti-aircraft weapons confronted them, forcing them to flee, but these black ravens hit some targets on the outskirts of the city of Baghdad."

"The planes bombed a civilian site with sophisticated rockets which led to the martyrdom and wounding of a number of people," the statement said.

The Iraqi military also said that its "brave warplanes confronted the enemy formations."

our national airspace for their bases of evil and aggression in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at 19:30 p.m. local time."

In the United States, military officials said U.S. Air Force and Navy aircraft attacked two Iraqi surface-to-air missile sites near Al Iskandariyah, a small town about 30 miles south of Baghdad, in response to anti-aircraft artillery fire directed at allied planes and in reaction to an Iraqi aircraft violation of the southern "no fly" zone.

In a statement from its headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, the U.S. Central Command said an unspecified number of F-15s and F/A-18 aircraft carried out the attacks. It did not say what kind of weapons were used.

The sites attacked were at the extreme edge of the southern "no-fly" zone, which extends to the outer suburbs of Baghdad.

U.S. and British planes conduct daily patrols in the zone that was established in 1992 to protect rebels from air attack by government forces.

"There were no coalition aircraft damaged during the incident and battle damage assessment is ongoing," the U.S. statement said.

Al Iskandariyah is the home of a large military industrial factory, which has been attacked in previous confrontations between Iraq and the Western allies.

The first indication of an attack near Baghdad came at 6:45 p.m. local time Wednesday evening when an air-raid siren wailed across the city.

Witnesses heard anti-aircraft fire near the western suburb of Radwaniyeh.

A second, stand-down siren went off at 7:10 p.m. local time.

Iraq's Aziz asks U.N. to ban Turkish incursions

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq has urged the U.N. secretary general to intervene to prevent Turkey from invading northern Iraq in pursuit of guerrillas loyal to jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan.

"The U.N. should shoulder its responsibility and prevent the continuous [Turkish] threat and aggression against Iraq," Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said in a letter to Kofi Annan carried by the official Iraqi News Agency on Wednesday.

"We urge you... to call on the Turkish government to withdraw its armed forces immediately from northern Iraq," the letter to Annan

said. Aziz said the Turkish incursions had caused "human and material losses" among Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq, for which his country should be compensated.

"The Iraqi government reserves the right of compensation for the damage sustained by such illegal practices," he added.

Thousands of Turkish troops, backed by warplanes and helicopter gunships, poured into the Kurdish-held enclave last week after Turkish commandos captured Ocalan in Kenya. Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit said the operation ended on Sunday.

During the incursion, designed to weaken the PKK guerrillas, the Turkish authorities called on Ocalan's forces to surrender under a partial amnesty to be passed by parliament after elections in April.

Ocalan has been charged with treason and faces trial in connection with his leading role in the PKK's 14-year armed struggle for Kurdish self-rule in south-east Turkey.

Aziz said Iraq rejected Turkey's "pretexts" for launching such operations and deems the claim of chasing rebellious elements does not give it the right to continue such policies.



A young Iranian girl looks Wednesday at campaign posters in Tehran for candidates in Iran's upcoming municipal elections, the country's first since the 1979 Islamic revolution. Observers say the elections will be a test of the political openness advocated by President Mohammad Khatami (AFP photo)

Iraq's Saddam 'teasing' Western warplanes

ABOARD HMS INVINCIBLE (R) — Iraqi President Saddam Hussein continues to "tease" Western aircraft enforcing no-fly zones over his country but is no great threat to British and U.S. forces, a senior British commander said on Wednesday.

Iraqi forces have violated the Western-imposed no-fly zone over southern Iraq more than 100 times since Operation Desert Fox, when British and U.S. forces raided Iraqi targets over four nights of air raids in December, said Commander Anthony Dymock.

The violations range from "just nibbling across the zone to coming right down close to the Saudi border," said Dymock, deputy commander of a British aircraft carrier battle group. "It seems as if they are designed to avoid contact with coalition aircraft if at all possible, and certainly when chased they retreat back over the border," Dymock said on the bridge of the carrier Invincible as a Dubai pilot guided the 20,000-tonne war-

ship into the Gulf Arab emirate's Port Rashid. "It's a sort of teasing operation to test whether we still have the will to go on enforcing the no-fly zone and, of course, we do," Dymock said.

He said Saddam was not conducting a conventional military campaign, but was probably aiming to show that his will and capability had not been completely destroyed by Western military action.

"So, although he doesn't represent a massive threat at any one time, his constant readiness to probe and look for weakness means that we can't afford to change our stance," he said.

Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon said on Tuesday that U.S. and British warplanes had destroyed about 20 per cent of Iraq's anti-aircraft surface-to-air missile batteries since December.

Dymock said there was a weekly pattern to Iraqi aircraft movements.

"He doesn't fly much at weekends," he said, adding that "he's tended not to

bring his aircraft within missile firing range and has tended to rely on the ground-based air defence system... We've had no direct engagements between our aircraft and Iraqi aircraft," Dymock said. No Iraqi aircraft had crossed either the Saudi or Kuwaiti borders "since we've been here" in late January, Dymock said, adding "they've got close but not achieved anything."

The southern no-fly zone was imposed after the 1991 Gulf War to protect Muslim Shiites in southern Iraq from attack by Saddam's forces. A similar zone in the north was imposed to protect Iraqi Kurds.

Saddam said after Operation Desert Fox — retribution for Iraq's refusal to cooperate with United Nations arms inspectors — that Baghdad would no longer recognise the zones.

Libya rejects accusations of 'manoeuvring' over suspects

TRIPOLI (AFP) — Libya rejected accusations Wednesday it was playing games in its quest for guarantees over the fate of two Libyan intelligence agents wanted for involvement in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing.

"How can you accuse those who are seeking necessary guarantees for their citizens of resorting to manoeuvres when it is Libya's natural right to ensure a fair and honest trial for its sons?" wrote the commentator for the official JANA news agency.

"The whole world knows perfectly well that Libya first proposed several years ago that the trial should take place

in a third country," said the commentator, whose views are close to those of Libyan President Muammar Qadhafi.

"But other parties have rejected this proposal and continue their own manoeuvring to torpedo or hamper the trial, because they don't have any evidence implicating the two suspects," he added.

The commentator accused those parties of wanting simply to further their own "hostile" political objectives against Libya, which "rejects the hegemony of Western countries particularly America, against certain countries."

"Libya has been under U.N.

sanctions since 1992 over its failure to surrender the two suspects wanted in connection with the 1988 bombing of a U.S. passenger jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, that left a total 270 people dead.

Diplomats in New York were pessimistic Monday that the two would be handed over before Friday, when the U.N. Security Council holds its regular four-monthly review of the sanctions.

"It looks like another play on their part," said one diplomat familiar with the process. "They're playing a game," said another.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote to Qadhafi

last week to ease Libyan concerns about the incarceration of the suspects if they are found guilty, and on the lifting of sanctions once the two are handed over.

But in his response to Annan, Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Al Muntasser requested further clarifications.

Washington and London have agreed to Libyan proposals to hold the trial in the Netherlands, under Scottish law and with Scottish judges, and are threatening to seek tougher sanctions unless the pair are handed over by the Friday deadline.

'CIA report a pretext for new attack'

KHARTOUM (AP) — A CIA report claiming Sudan is acquiring mass destruction weapons is a pretext for the United States to bomb Sudan again, the army's spokesman said in remark published Wednesday.

The spokesman, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Osman Yassin, said the U.S. missile attack in August on Al Shifa pharmaceutical plant in the capital Khartoum was one in a series of American aggressions against Sudan for not "revolving in the orbit of the U.S. and Israel."

The CIA report, issued Feb. 9, said Sudan and other countries such as Egypt, Libya,

Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Syria and India were key consumers of missile-related equipment and components supplied by Russia, China and North Korea.

"These allegations can be a new pretext to harass Sudan and aim another attack," Yassin was quoted as saying by the daily Al Rai Al Aam newspaper. He did not elaborate. The U.S. administration had attacked the pharmaceutical plant, saying it was used to produce biological weapons.

The Islamist government of President Omar Al Bashir, who took power in a 1989 bloodless coup, is on a U.S. list of terror-exporting admin-

istrations. Also Thursday, the daily Akhbar Al Youm reported that Sudan complained to the U.N. Security Council about Uganda hosting a meeting for scores of Sudanese opposition leaders who renewed their vow to topple Al Bashir's government.

In his letter to the council, Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail said Uganda was interfering in Sudan's domestic affairs, "a very serious phenomenon to which the Security Council must put an end." The paper did not say when Ismail sent the letter.

Uganda broke off diplomatic relations with Sudan in 1994, charging that Khar-

toum backs Ugandan rebels. Sudan retorted that Uganda harboured Sudanese opposition.

The three-day opposition conference which ended Feb. 12 also recommended drawing a new constitution for Sudan which would guarantee tribal, racial and religious tolerance and self-determination for all Sudanese.

The recommendations were aimed at providing a solution to the 16-year-old war between the predominantly animist and Christian southerners who seek autonomy from the Muslim and Arabised north.

Israeli Arab legislators plan visit to Iraq

TEL AVIV (AP) — An Israeli Arab legislator and an adviser to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat plan to meet with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the lawmaker said Wednesday.

The meeting is being organised by the Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) envoy to Iraq and is intended to show support

for Iraq which has been the target of British and U.S. air strikes.

"We see the American attacks as a war aimed at eradicating the Iraqi people," said legislator Taleb Al Sana.

Al Sana said he will be accompanied on the trip by Ahmad Tibi, an Israeli Arab physician who also serves as an adviser to Arafat. The

meeting with Saddam is to be held within the next few weeks, but no date has been set yet, Al Sana said, adding that he hopes other Arab lawmakers will join him.

Earlier this month, Israeli Arab lawmakers met with Iraqi Vice President Taha Muheidin Marouf during the funeral of King Hussein.

Taleban ask Ben Laden to return to Afghan stronghold — paper

DUBAI (AFP) — The Taleban militia has asked alleged terrorist mastermind Osama Ben Laden to return to its Kandahar stronghold in southwest Afghanistan, the Arabic newspaper Al Hayat reported Wednesday.

The London-based daily said a Taleban delegation travelled to Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan to meet the Saudi dissident, who left Kandahar around two weeks ago.

The Taleban believes that "Ben Laden will not leave Afghanistan and have come to the conclusion his presence in Kandahar would allow them to limit his movements," it said.

But the multi-millionaire Islamist militant "feels freer in Jalalabad," where he fought alongside the Mujahedeen during the Soviet occupation of the 1980s, it said.

On Feb. 17, a Taleban official said in Washington after meeting a senior U.S. diplomat that Ben Laden was no longer in territory controlled by the Islamist militia.

"He is not in the area in control of the Taleban," Abdul Hakim Mujahid, the Taleban's New York-based representative said. "He decided himself to leave, we do not know where he is."

Al Hayat said the same day that Ben Laden had moved to a military base near Jalalabad that served the Hezb-e-Islami faction of Yunes Khaless during the Soviet occupation. It is now also under Taleban control.

Ben Laden is wanted in the United States for alleged involvement in the Aug. 7, 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in which some 250 people were killed, including 12 Americans.

Washington has offered a \$5 million reward for his capture. Thirteen days after the bombings, suspected Ben Laden bases in Afghanistan were targeted by U.S. cruise missiles.

Home



Queen Noor of Jordan meets Sultan Hamid II of Brunei.

Queen Noor of Jordan met with Sultan Hamid II of Brunei in London on Wednesday. The Queen and her husband, King Hussein, are on a tour of the United Kingdom. The Sultan and his wife, Queen Halima, are also on a tour of the United Kingdom. The two royal couples met for a private audience at Buckingham Palace. The Queen and the Sultan discussed the friendship between Jordan and Brunei, and the role of women in their respective countries. The Queen also presented the Sultan with a gift from Jordan.

Hourani to discuss

Hourani will discuss the role of women in Jordanian society. He will also discuss the role of women in the Arab world. Hourani is a prominent Jordanian scholar and writer. He has written several books on the role of women in Jordanian society. He is also a member of the Jordanian Academy of Sciences. Hourani will be speaking at a conference in Jordan on the role of women in society. The conference is being organized by the Jordanian Women's Union. Hourani's speech is expected to be a landmark event in the history of women's rights in Jordan.

SPP building other projects

The Social Progress Partnership (SPP) is building other projects in Jordan. The SPP is a non-profit organization that works to improve the lives of the poor in Jordan. It has been successful in building schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure. The SPP is also working to improve the lives of the poor through social services and community development projects. The SPP is a model of successful social development in Jordan.

JORDAN TELEVISION

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PROGRAMME TWO

19:10 News headlines
19:35 Doc. — Perspective
20:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)
20:30 Programme on the late His Majesty King Hussein
21:00 Islamic History in Jordan
21:30 On the Banks of Jordan
22:00 News in English
22:10 Doc. — National Geographic
23:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

PRAYER TIMES

04:47 Fajr
06:05 Sunrise
11:49 Dhuhr
15:02 Asr
17:33 Maghreb
18:50 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
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Armenian International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

<p>The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932 St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757 Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440 Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138 Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5930146 The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757 The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190 Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679 The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052 The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331 The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261</p> <p>WEATHER Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology</p> <p>Skies will be partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers in the northern parts of the Kingdom, and winds westerly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate, and seas calm.</p> <p>Amman 05/15 Aqaba 10/20</p>	<p>Deserts 02/16 Jordan Valley 09/21</p> <p>Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 17, Aqaba 22 Humidity readings: Amman 28 per cent, Aqaba 35 per cent.</p> <p>Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:</p> <p>Ajloun 02/10 Jerash 05/16 Um Qays 04/15 Madaba 03/14 Petra 01/15 Dead Sea 09/22</p> <p>USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY</p> <p>AMMAN: Dr. Yusef Rashid 4875792 Dr. Jum'a Abu Dhiab 4758848 Dr. Khalil Jibali 4784450 Dr. Walid Al Masri 5675485</p> <p>AMMAN: Firas Pharmacy 5661912 Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730 Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004 Ruka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169</p> <p>IRBID: Dr. Issam Salih 02124883</p>	<p>Food Control Centre 4637111 Civil Defence Department 5661111 Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341 Civil Defence Emergency 199 Rescue Police 192 4621111, 4637777 Fire Brigade 4617101 Blood Bank 4775121 Highway Police 5343402 Traffic Police 4896390 Public Security Dept 4630321 Hotel Complaints 5605800 Price Complaints 5661176 Water & Sewage Complaints 487467 Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111 Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121 Overseas Calls 0132 Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101 Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101 Jordan Television 4773111 Radio Jordan 4774111 Water Authority 5680100 J. Electricity Authority 5815615 Electric Power Co. 4636381 RJ Flight Information 44-53200 Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200</p> <p>HOSPITALS</p> <p>AMMAN: The Arab Centre for Heart and Sp-</p>	<p>Foot & Pharmacy (02)275360 ZARQA: Dr. Walid Halaseh (05)982799 Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562</p> <p>EMERGENCIES</p> <p>Food Control Centre 4637111 Civil Defence Department 5661111 Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341 Civil Defence Emergency 199 Rescue Police 192 4621111, 4637777 Fire Brigade 4617101 Blood Bank 4775121 Highway Police 5343402 Traffic Police 4896390 Public Security Dept 4630321 Hotel Complaints 5605800 Price Complaints 5661176 Water & Sewage Complaints 487467 Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111 Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121 Overseas Calls 0132 Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101 Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101 Jordan Television 4773111 Radio Jordan 4774111 Water Authority 5680100 J. Electricity Authority 5815615 Electric Power Co. 4636381 RJ Flight Information 44-53200 Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200</p> <p>HOSPITALS</p> <p>AMMAN: The Arab Centre for Heart and Sp-</p>	<p>5921199 The Islamic Abdi 5666131/7 Husseini Medical Centre 5856856 Luznla 4630195 Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6 Akilsh Maternity 4642441/2 Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362 Malhus, J. Amman 4636140 Palestine Shmeisani 5607071 Shmeisani Hospital 5607431 Jordan Hospital 5607550 University Hospital 5353444 Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9 Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6 Isailan, Al-Muhajreen 477101/3 Al-Bashir 4775111/26 Army, Marka 4891611/5 Queen Alia Hospital 5151100 Amal Hospital 5607155 Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000</p> <p>FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT</p> <p>This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) Information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. 44153300-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5</p> <p>ARRIVALS</p> <p>Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights 07:15 Sanan (RJ) 08:25 Bombay (RJ) 08:50 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ) 09:30 New Delhi (RJ) 10:05 Beirut (RJ) 10:05 Muscat, Dubai (RJ) 10:15 Doha, Bahrain (RJ) 10:45 Colombo (RJ) 16:25 London (RJ) 18:05 Kuwait (RJ) 18:15 Athens (RJ) 18:15 Kuwait (RJ) 19:55 Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ) 20:00 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ) 23:40 Lamaca (RJ)</p> <p>Other Flights 13:15 Riyadh (SV)</p>	<p>14:10 Sharjah (AH) 14:45 Doha (QR) 15:55 Dubai (EK) 17:25 Muscat, Dubai (GF) 18:40 Beirut (ME) 19:45 Paris (AF) 20:25 Tel Aviv (LY) 20:40 Cairo (MS) 21:30 London, Beirut (BA) 23:10 Istanbul (TK) 00:25 Moscow (SU) 01:15 Amsterdam (KL)</p> <p>Royal Wings (RW) Flights For Thursday 08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW) 13:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW) 18:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW) 23:15 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)</p> <p>For Friday 08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW) 17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA) (RW) 18:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW) 18:40 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)</p> <p>DEPARTURES</p> <p>Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights 06:30 Beirut (RJ) 11:00 Shannon, Chicago (RJ) 11:25 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)</p>	<p>11:35 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ) 12:05 Kuwait (RJ) 12:10 Amsterdam, Paris (RJ) 12:15 London (RJ) 12:15 Athens (RJ) 20:00 Lamaca (RJ) 20:30 Jeddah (RJ) 21:30 Cairo (RJ) 00:10 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)</p> <p>Other Flights 05:50 Damascus, Frankfurt (LH) 14:45 Riyadh (SV) 15:00 Annabab, Algiers (AF) 15:35 Doha (QR) 17:00 Damascus, Dubai (EK) 18:15 Abu Dhabi, Muscat (GF) 20:00 Beirut (ME) 20:50 Tel Aviv (LY) 21:40 Cairo (MS) 01:55 Moscow (SU) 02:15 Amsterdam (KL) 06:00 Istanbul (TK) 07:15 Beirut, London (BA) 07:25 Paris (AF)</p> <p>Royal Wings (RW) Flights For Thursday 08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW) 11:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW) 19:45 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW) 20:15 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)</p> <p>For Friday 08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW) 13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport) (RW) 16:15 Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW) 20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)</p>
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You

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — Students suffer from pre-exam tension with all its experience feelings, butterflies in the stomach, shaky and sweaty hands, and heart palpitations, as well as restlessness, dizziness, and fatigue.

Studies show that almost all students at all educational levels undergo some degree of anxiety before sitting for an exam. This is reflected in their physical and psychological condition as well as their performance, they indicate. Doctors say "testophobia" is a widespread form of anxiety disorder that may cause physical and mental blocks that

Taleban ask Ben Laden to return to Afghan stronghold — paper



Her Majesty Queen Noor Wednesday meets with Prince Walid Ben Talal at Bab Al Salam Palace

Queen meets with Prince Walid Ben Talal, receives Sultan Qaboos' Advisor Omar Zawawi

AMMAN — Her Majesty Queen Noor Wednesday met with Prince Walid Ben Talal at Bab Al Salam. Queen Noor thanked Prince Walid for his numerous calls to His Majesty the late King Hussein, while he was undergoing treatment at the Mayo Clinic. "It meant so much to us you were thinking of us during that time," the Queen told Prince Walid.

Queen Noor expressed her gratitude for Prince Walid's visit and for his interest in this oasis, our country Jordan, to

which King Hussein gave all his thoughts, energy and commitment."

Prince Walid affirmed his support for Jordan saying "I am the ooe of King Hussein and the son of Jordan."

Earlier Queen Noor received Sultan Qaboos' Advisor for Foreign Relations Omar Zawawi at Bab Al Salam.

Zawawi was accompanied by his wife, his daughter and his niece Princess Areej Gbazi.

Prince Zeid visits grave

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Prince Zeid Ben Shaker Wednesday visited His Majesty King Hussein's grave, where he recited verses from the Holy Koran on the late King's soul.

Also yesterday, a number of general directors of public and private companies, students and other citizens from around the country visited the grave.

The Royal Court is still receiving citizens, who are flocking to register their condolences.

Hourani in Baghdad to discuss 1999 trade deal

AMMAN (R) — Trade Minister Mohammad Hourani left for Baghdad on Wednesday to discuss renewal of an annual "oil for goods" barter deal which supplies Amman's energy needs, officials said.

During the talks, which will start on Thursday, Hourani and his Iraqi counterpart were expected to decide what goods Jordan would supply to Iraq in return for the 4.5 million tonnes of crude and refined oil it will receive from Baghdad.

The officials said Iraq was expected to give a breakdown of the goods it seeks under the barter protocol. The two sides would also discuss separate Jordanian bids for food and medical export contracts under the U.N.-approved "oil-for-food" accord.

Officials say this year the value of Jordanian goods sent to Iraq under the bilateral

protocol is likely to be at most \$200 million, compared to \$225 million last year, reflecting weak international oil prices.

"The drop in the value of the protocol this year is due to the fall in world oil prices," said a trade ministry official.

The value of Jordanian goods which Iraq is owed under the protocol has in the past been calculated at a half of the total value of the oil, minus a small discount, industry experts say.

The Central Bank handles accounts and pays Jordanian exporters out of a fund financed by oil imports from Iraq.

Three years ago, when political ties between the two countries cooled, Jordan halved the value of goods it sent to Baghdad, which had stood at over \$400 million, saying Iraq was running up debts according to the agreed pricing.

The United Nations, which imposed strict economic sanctions on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, has turned a blind eye to the trade protocol which lets resource-poor Jordan import all its oil requirements without paying out hard currency.

Jordan has been totally dependent on Iraq for its oil supplies since Saudi Arabia stopped the flow of an estimated 40,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude to punish Amman for its pro-Iraqi sympathies during the 1990-91 Gulf war.

Jordan and Saudi Arabia have since witnessed a gradual warming of ties and Amman has come under pressure from Western and some Arab supporters to reduce trade with Baghdad.

But Gulf oil-producing countries have yet to offer Jordan comparable terms for alternative supplies of oil.

SPP building under way in Amman, Zarqa, other projects to get started in Marka areas

AMMAN (Petra) — Under the framework of the Social Productivity Programme, the General Corporation for Housing and Urban Development is currently working on improving the infrastructure of three areas in Amman and Zarqa in order to boost living and environmental standards there.

Director General Yousef Hiyasat said that in July the corporation will start building 100 housing units worth JD400,00 in Zarqa's Al

Zawahreh area that will accommodate 675 people.

The project, expected to be completed by October 2000, will include renewing water, wastewater and electricity networks as well as constructing new roads and parks.

Hiyasat added that another similar project will begin in Marka area, where Wadi Qattar residents will benefit from the construction of 174 housing units worth JD630,000 and will be built

on 175 dunums. The units will house 1,300 people.

The project's implementation is expected to start in August and it will include similar water network facilities.

The third project, slated to begin in October, will be the development of Marka's Abu Sayyah village, where 100 housing units worth JD900,00 will be constructed on 241 dunums for 600 people, according to the director general.

Insurance and Auditors Union presses government for amendments to new banking hour regulations

By Suha Ma'ayeh

AMMAN — The Jordan Trade Union of Insurance and Auditors Employees (JTUIAE) is pressing the government to introduce changes to the Central Bank of Jordan's recent decision to implement a two-day weekend and extend daily banking hours.

The union sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh on Monday urging him to alter working hours so that bank employees start work at 8:00 a.m. and finish at 3:30 p.m.

Fakhri Zayadin, JTUIAE deputy blasted the CBJ decision on grounds that the CBJ is not entitled to specify working hours.

"The bank is entitled to regulate the working hours only, specifying them resulted in having long working days," Zayadin

told the Jordan times.

The CBJ decision, announced earlier this month by Ziyad Fariz, CBJ

'The proposed change might force a cutback in the workforce, especially among working mothers'

— Zayadin

governor, asked the country's 22 commercial banks to close on Friday and Saturday as of March 1, instead of Friday alone, and to increase daily working hours to make up for the lost time.

Under the new rules, banks will have to operate from Sunday to Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with

a 30 minute lunch break bringing the total number of working hours to a maximum of 42.5 instead of 36 hours.

Most of the country's 15,000 bank employees received the announcement with storms of protest.

"The new measures overstep employees' rights acquired over the years," Zayadin said.

"Bank employees are better off [to start work] at 8:00, there is no justification that employees stay at home till 8:30 a.m.," he said. "If we do without the 45-minute daily break banks are considering, then bank employees can work 40 hours instead of 42.5."

Bankers who believe the new arrangements will boost economic and business performance said prolonging working hours at financial institutions for another three hours will

narrow the gap between the Jordanian financial sector and major financial markets.

Now that banks have lent their approval to the CBJ decision, Zayadin said they must abide by the 1996 Labour Law.

"The proposed change might force a cutback in the workforce, especially among working mothers," he said.

Article 72 says in institutions where there are more than 20 mothers, employers should secure nurseries for children below the age of four.

"We also believe that opening the doors to the public at 8:00 and closing them at 12:30 is an acquired right, therefore we are against having to attend to the customers' needs for a longer time," Zayadin said.

The trade union is asking for a raise in bank employees' salaries to compensate them for the extra working hours.

"Most bank employees have adjusted their day-to-day life styles around six-hour work day, and the change will affect families' affairs, both socially and economically," Zayadin said.

"If a working mother who has taken a housing loan decides to quit her job after the decision is approved, this will surely hurt the family's income," Zayadin said.

"Our practical suggestions, which are in line with the 1996 Labour Law, were not taken into consideration," Zayadin stressed.

"We are asking for a dialogue with the prime minister, the CBJ and the Association of Banks to take our opinion into consideration," he added.

Jordan denies establishment of Israeli intelligence office in Amman

'No Israeli offices in Amman except for the Israeli embassy' — Tarawneh

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan categorically denied rumours alleging it has allowed Israeli intelligence services to open an office in Amman and senior officials have described the allegations as sheer imagination.

Interior Minister Nayef Qadi told the Lower House of Parliament that there is no truth to the rumours.

"Except for the Israeli embassy in Amman there are no other Israeli offices [operating in the Kingdom] whatsoever. This applies to [Jordan's] activities in [Israel] which are limited to be embassy in Tel Aviv."

The minister was responding to a query in Parliament by Deputy

Fawaz Zou'bi who demanded that the government clarify the situation and refute rumours by what he called "certain elements who conspire against the Kingdom."

Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Kreissan responded to a query by another deputy concerning the municipal elections. He said that these elections will take place on schedule in the first half of June 1999.

He said the ministry has introduced an amendment to the municipalities law. Parliament's Legal Committee will meet today to debate it before it is referred to the full house

for approval.

Minister of Water and Irrigation Hani Mulki responded to a query by another deputy concerning the construction of a diversion dam on the Yarmouk River in northern Jordan.

He said according to the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty, the dam is needed to secure Jordan's share of the river water.

He said last year the two countries began constructing the JD1.65 billion diversion dam to more effectively utilise 40 million cubic metres of the river water each year and regulate year-round inflow of water to the 110-kilometre-long King Abdullah Canal in the Jordan Valley.

Under Annex II of the peace treaty, Israel may extract 12 million cubic metres of water during summer months — May 15-Oct. 15 — and Jordan extracts the rest of the Yarmouk's flow.

In winter — Oct. 16-May 14 — Israel pumps 13 million cubic metres and Jordan concedes to Israel pumping an additional 20 million cubic metres from the river.

Minister of State for Development Affairs Taher Kanaan answered deputies' queries about his visit with the ministers of planning and finance to Saudi Arabia.

He said the delegation's visit was successful by all

standards.

"We have found great appreciation of Jordan's economic concerns and Saudi leaders said they would respond positively to our needs in accordance with their own financial situation and the decline in the price of oil," Kanaan pointed out.

He said, "We came to an agreement with the Saudi brothers on holding a meeting by the joint Jordanian-Saudi Arabian economic committee to discuss trade exchanges and on opening the door to Jordanian workers and on encouraging investment and capital flow between the two sides."

Young artists win accolades at international children's art exhibition in Czech Republic

AMMAN (J.T.) — Three young Jordanian artists who participated in an international exhibition of children's art in the Czech Republic have been awarded a medal and two honourable diplomas for their drawings.

The jury of the 26th Lidice Exhibition has chosen the works of Tareq Bisbara Al Najjar (15), Ostar Salim Sunna (7) and Manal Saleem Fashieh (14) of the National Orthodox School among the remarkable entries coming from over 60 countries.

The exhibition is held annually to honour the memory of the young victims who perished in the destruction of the Czech town of Lidice during World War II. The competition is open to artists between the ages of five and fifteen.

Jordanian students have participated regularly in

the last few years of the exhibition that brings together artwork by European, African, Arab, Asian and American children.

The awards of Lidice '98 will be handed to the Jordanian students by Czech Ambassador to Jordan Tomas Smetanka today at 10:00 a.m. at the embassy in Abdoun.

Lidice '99 exhibition, devoted to the International Year of the Elderly, will open in June in the Czech Republic. Paintings, graphics, sculptures and photographs related to theme of elderly, for example, "my grandparents," "elderly people in my town," as well as to the permanent theme of the exhibition (Life of the World's Children). All works received before April 1, 1999, will be welcome.

Japan donates medical equipment to family planning association

AMMAN (J.T.) — Tokyo has extended a grant of \$80,156 to the Jordanian Association for Family Planning and Protection (JAFFP) to finance necessary medical equipment for a new clinic in Amman, according to a press release issued by the Japanese embassy.

The grant agreement was signed at the embassy Wednesday by JAFFP President Anwar Al Hadid and Koichi Matsumoto, Japan's ambassador to Jordan.

The JAFFP, set up in 1964, has been a leading organisation in addressing population issues. It currently runs 18 clinics and two mobile clinics to provide medical services to expectant mothers and newborn babies and to raise public awareness of reproductive health.

JAFFP's new clinic, near Al Hussein Sports City, falls within the association's plan to

expand medical services to the public, said the press release.

The Japanese government's grant will enable the association to purchase obstetric and gynaecological medical equipment.

"It gives me great pleasure to be a signatory on behalf of my government to an agreement extending assistance to a vital health sector that focuses on the health of children and women, a right that is guaranteed by international conventions," Matsumoto told the signing ceremony.

"Japan will continue to support such medical schemes that benefit Jordanians, because healthy citizens means a healthy society and a healthy nation, something that should be among the priorities of governments."

The government of Japan is also implementing a family planning project in Ghor Safi, at

work since 1996, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the National Population Committee (NPC), Queen Alia Food for Social Development (QAF) and JAFFP.

The latest grant is extended under the framework of Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects (GAGP) Programme, which mainly aims at supporting Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO's) and local governments.

The government of Japan has so far extended \$3.1 million to NGO's and local governments in Jordan under the GAGP programme. Japan's contributions to the medical sector in Jordan stands at \$661,023.

Tawjihi stressing you out? You may suffer from testophobia — a certified anxiety disorder

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — Students suffering from pre-exam tension will generally experience feelings of jittery, butterflies in the stomach, shaky and sweaty hands, nausea, and heart palpitations, as well as restlessness, doctors say.

Studies show that almost all students at all educational levels undergo some degree of anxiety or unease before sitting for a test. This is reflected in students' physical and psychological condition as well as their performance, they indicate.

Doctors say "testophobia" is a widespread form of anxiety disorder that may cause mental distraction, physical symptoms and mental blocks that render

students unable to think effectively of the task at hand.

"Students view tests as a threat, a perception which generates a sense of fear, relentlessness and sometimes a wide range of scepticism about one's abilities to overcome such a posing danger," said Imad Khreim, a psychiatrist with a subspecialty in mood and anxiety disorders.

However, a certain amount of tension could sometimes be a blessing in disguise as it helps students perform better.

"If the amount of adrenaline in the blood increases, it results in more alertness and hence more focus," said one health expert.

But when tension exceeds the normal limit, it may negatively

disturb other body functions, often resulting in less sleep, strange dreams and nightmares, loss of or excessive appetite, lack of concentration and forgetfulness, Khreim explained.

Last year, Jordanians were shocked by a "stressed" Tawjihi student who murdered 11 family members. The student, who did not pass the exam the first time, was quoted as saying that the intolerable pressure he was subjected to prior to the exam and the threat of being kicked out of the house if he failed a second time led him to commit the crime. Experts said tension and a sense of worthlessness were cited as critical factors behind the crime.

According to Khreim, treatment programmes involve psy-

chotherapy or the so-called "talk therapy" where a psychiatrist traces the patient's exaggerated worrying thoughts.

They are often combined with medical treatment to relieve symptoms of anxiety disorders.

The Ministry of Education is currently considering the idea of cancelling the Tawjihi (high school general certificate exam) by the year 2003 on grounds it does not provide an accurate measure of students' academic abilities and because of the "enormous amount of stress it creates for students and their families."

However, officials remain divided on a suitable substitute for the exam.

As for now, the one-chance Tawjihi remains the sole cri-

terion for admittance to the universities or any post-scholastic education.

According to last year's Tawjihi results, only 47.9 percent of total of 98,394 students who sat for the exam passed.

Many Tawjihi students have often described their last year in high school as a nightmare, a disaster and a feeling of imprisonment.

According to school counsellors, exam-related stress forms the majority of cases they encounter.

The Department of Counselling and Special Education at the University of Jordan believes a large percentage of Tawjihi students suffer anxiety, usually in the form of nervous breakdowns, fainting, and

headaches. He added that they are more prone to diseases such as flu and colds due to the low immunity level caused by anxiety.

Nazih Hamdi, associate professor of counselling psychology at the University's Faculty of Educational Sciences, says some students engage in what is known as avoidance behaviour by stopping studies.

Experts suggest different tips and relaxation activities which may help students alleviate their anxiety, such as listening to music, exercising, or taking long baths. Experts also recommend that students substitute negative thoughts with positive ones, and urge them to have confidence in their abilities.

Serbs proclaim victory in Kosovo talks; Albanians defiant

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — With the threat of NATO air strikes temporarily averted, Serbia's negotiators returned home in triumph Wednesday from Kosovo peace talks, declaring they had prevailed against enormous international pressure.

State-run media joined in the exultation, describing the outcome in Rambouillet, France, as a victory for the government's policy of keeping foreign troops out of the province.

In another ominous sign for prospects for a peace settlement, ethnic Albanian leaders pressed ahead with their goal of independence and took a step effectively sidestepping the negotiations process.

Ethnic Albanian sources said the Albanian delegation in France, which was unable to get international officials to go along with its demand for an independence referendum, had decided Tuesday to form a new "government" that will function until elections can be held.

The government will be a coalition of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and two major political parties — Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Rexhep Kosja's Union of Democratic Movement — said the KLA's news agency Kosovo Press and the LDK.

The announcement is

seen as an attempt to bring unity to the often disparate Kosovo Albanian political parties. Rugova, who until the talks had ignored the rebels, has for seven years headed a self-described ethnic Albanian government which is not recognised by Serbian authorities.

Peace talks were suspended Tuesday until March 15 after Western mediators extracted only partial agreement between warring Serbs and ethnic Albanians from Kosovo on a political framework for the separatist Serbian province.

The military part of the proposed accord — which provides for the stationing of 28,000 NATO peacekeepers to oversee implementation — was left unresolved because of Serbia's steadfast refusal to allow foreign troops onto its territory.

Serbian President Milan Milutinovic told reporters at Belgrade airport that the talks had achieved "significant initial success" in solving the problems in war-torn Kosovo.

"Our principal efforts to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country were affirmed," Milutinovic said.

The note of triumph was echoed on Serbia's state-run television, a government mouthpiece, which reran four times overnight and Wednesday morning a broadcast of

Milutinovic's news conference after talks had been suspended. He described attempts to pressure the Serbs into accepting NATO peacekeepers as a "farce and a circus."

"No agreement on military forces" declared a headline in the Politika Ekspres daily. "Our people know how to respond to aggression," said a headline in Borba.

Both newspapers are controlled by the ruling socialist party and reflect the government's view.

"If necessary, we will go to war (with NATO) bravely and heroically," declared Gen. Nebojsa Pavkovic, the Serb commander in Kosovo, as cited by state television.

In Kosovo, the mood among prominent ethnic Albanians was defiant.

A top KLA figure and the chief ethnic Albanian delegate in France, Hashim Thaci, was quoted as saying Kosovars "should not expect much" from the next round of negotiations, and urged them to unite behind and strengthen the KLA.

"I did not sign any agreement in Rambouillet," Albanian-run media quoted him as saying. "I can sign only an agreement authorised by the people of Kosovo."

The Kosovo Albanian negotiators were expected back from France later Wednesday.



Dozens missing in Austrian avalanche; 14 confirmed dead

LANDECK, Austria (AP) — Hundreds of soldiers arrived by helicopter to a stricken town Wednesday to help residents dig for victims of a massive avalanche that has killed at least 14 people.

The death toll from Tuesday's avalanche at Galtuer was expected to rise, provincial governor Wendelin Weingartner told reporters. About two dozen people were still missing in the village in the Tyrol province, near the Swiss border.

Children, foreign tourists and locals were among the missing and those killed, Weingartner said. Dutch television reported that as many as 13 Dutch nationals were among the missing.

Rescue workers recovered at least 20 injured,

who were flown by helicopter to regional hospitals. Six of the wounded required intensive care and were taken immediately to the hospital near Landeck, (40 kilometres) from Galtuer.

By midday, at least 350 people, many of them German tourists, had been evacuated to Landeck, where rescue operations were headquartered.

"I thought it was just a storm," said Hanno Heinz, 17, from Radstadt, Germany. Heinz, who was visiting Galtuer, added that the snow came with such force that it blew open the hinged windows of the guesthouse, dumping 10 centimetres of snow on the floor.

The Galtuer avalanche was one of the worst to

strike Central Europe this winter as the region continues to endure its heaviest snowfall in 50 years.

Tens of thousands of travellers have been stranded in train stations, traffic jams and "isolated resort towns" across France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria as avalanches buried homes, roads and railways. More than 60 people across Europe have died in avalanches this year.

Snow was so heavy that it forced a rare cancellation of Wednesday's events at the Nordic skiing world championships Ramsau in central Austria, where a half-metre of snow fell overnight. "We haven't had so much snow in 25 years," said Wolfgang Mitter, the organising committee chief.

Two Singapore critics jailed, candidacy barred for illegal rally

SINGAPORE (AFP) — Two Singapore opposition politicians were jailed for 12 days and barred from running for parliament in the next election after being convicted Wednesday of holding an illegal rally.

Chee Soon Juan, secretary-general of the tiny Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), and assistant secretary-general Wong Hong Tow, refused to pay fines and were immediately jailed in default, associates said.

"I am not on trial for a crime. I am in a political struggle. What is on trial is the system the PAP has created," Chee had said in court during his final submission, referring to the People's Action Party (PAP) which has ruled Singapore for 40 years.

Chee, a U.S.-trained neuro-psychologist, was fined 2,500 Singapore dollars (\$1,470) while Wong was fined 2,400 Singapore dollars — effectively barring them from running for parliament.

"At the moment they have already made their stand very clear that they are not going to pay the fine and they have already been taken to the remand prison," Gandhi Ambalam, vice-chairman of the SDP, told reporters.

Any fine in excess of 2,000 Singapore dollars bars a citizen from running for office for the next five years. Chee ran unsuccessfully in the last elections, held in January 1997, for a five-year parliamentary term.

In passing sentence, Judge

Mavis Chionh noted that both the accused had acknowledged they failed to apply for the licence to make a political speech outdoors on Jan. 5 and thus had acted in a "deliberate" and "wilful" manner against the law.

The absence of public disorder at the rally held in the raffles place financial district was a mitigating factor, she said, but added that the sentence "should not be negligible or insignificant."

Chee, served a week in jail earlier this month after refusing to pay a fine of 1,400 Singapore dollars (\$830) on a similar charge resulting from a December speech, also at the raffles place banking centre.

Wong, 61, assisted Chee by holding a speaker and giving him a microphone, which the court also deemed a violation of the public entertainment act. He had been fined for a similar offence in 1988.

Chee, speaking in his own defence earlier, had declared readiness to go to jail again as part of a campaign to push the government to relax limits on free speech.

"I don't want to step into prison again. It is demoralising and brutalises one's spirit. But (if) I have to spend time in jail to show that I'm doing it for my country, then consider it done," he said.

Chee's Taiwanese-born wife Huang Chih Mei, a fellow psychologist who is expecting their first child over the weekend and

was present at Tuesday's proceedings, received the news calmly. "It was not unexpected," she said.

In a statement, Chee's co-accused, Wong, reiterated he had done nothing wrong.

"This is the political situation today in Singapore. This is how the PAP controls society. This is how it treats people that speak up," Wong said.

Chee earlier told the court the law on public speeches was being applied in favour of the PAP.

"Government has stipulated that talks of a political nature are not allowed because they might lead to public disorder," he said.

"Why then are PAP leaders allowed to give political speeches in public places and criticise the opposition?" he added.

"It is because of what the ruling party has been doing to the opposition that has led me to this present course of action, or I won't have to resort to public speaking," Chee said.

The PAP has been in power since 1959 and won all but two of the 83 seats contested in the January 1997 parliamentary elections.

The SDP's Ambalam said his party would pursue its cause for democracy in Singapore despite the disqualification of their party leaders.

"Democracy does not mean only contesting elections or holding elections once every five years," he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

No decision to sign CTBT yet, says Indian FM

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India has not yet decided whether to sign the global nuclear test ban treaty, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told parliament Wednesday. Singh told the lower house there was not an "iota of truth" in reports that India had agreed to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in "its present form." "The government's stand remains what it has been... what (the prime minister) has stated in the United Nations General Assembly," Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had told the U.N. that India was prepared to bring its discussions with "key interlocutors" to a successful conclusion so that the entry into force of the CTBT was not delayed beyond September 1999. While that statement was widely taken as a pledge to sign the treaty before September, Indian officials have insisted it was not a binding commitment. India has made it clear that it will not be guided by anybody in deferring its nuclear deterrent," Singh said, referring to ongoing nuclear talks with the United States. "We shall define our own nuclear deterrent on the basis of our own assessment. We will not accept any suggestion from outside as to what the minimum deterrent should be. Singh said the talks with the United States — after eight rounds — were now focused on four issues related to security, disarmament and non-proliferation. "It has been decided that India-U.S. expert-level teams will meet in March for follow-up talks on export controls. The leaders of the delegation will also remain in contact," he said. "While these talks would continue, both sides will endeavour to create a positive atmosphere for furthering their relations."

Strike brings Bangladesh's main port to a halt

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh (AFP) — A protest strike called by the opposition — in an attempt to disrupt local elections halted operations at Bangladesh's main port of Chittagong Wednesday, officials said. A port official said 30 ships carrying food were waiting in the Bay of Bengal for space to berth while about a dozen container vessels were either waiting at the outer anchorage or the port jetty. The official said 14,000 containers were at the port awaiting delivery and 4,000 more were on waiting ships. "It is real chaos as we have capacity to accommodate 10,000 containers," he added. The general strike kept businesses shut and most vehicles off the streets in this southeastern port city. Bombs went off in the capital Dhaka Wednesday on the second of three days of local elections amid the opposition stoppage. The strike has triggered violence in major cities, leaving three dead. The opposition led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party has called the general strike, set to end Thursday night, to disrupt the polls. It accuses the Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena of bias and has demanded his resignation. He rejected the charges. The business community has repeatedly voiced concern over recent political shutdowns which are estimated to cost the economy four billion taka (\$83 million) a day. "It hurts all and benefits none," said Abdul Awal Mintoo, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Malaysian state opposed to foreign observers monitoring election

KOTA KINABALU, Malaysia (AFP) — A senior official in eastern Malaysia's Sabah state Wednesday criticised moves to invite foreign observers to monitor an upcoming election. Osu, deputy Sabah chief minister said it was "an insult to the sovereignty of the country to suggest international observers to monitor and check the election process in the state." "The election commission is well prepared and capable of handling the state election in fair and proper manner," Osu said it was the norm for the opposition to paint an ugly picture of the government as if it was not capable of conducting a proper election. Meanwhile, Harun Din, election commission chairman who arrived here to oversee preparations for the two-day election from March 12 avoided comment on the demand for foreign monitors. "It is up to the government to decide whether to allow international observers to monitor the election," Harun said. The opposition Sabah United Party (PBS) said Tuesday it wanted international observers. We urge the federal government and its agents to refrain from repeating the undemocratic actions imposed on PBS and the people of Sabah during the 1994 elections," said PBS President Joseph Palih Kitingan. His main fear is the presence of so-called "phantom voters" on the electoral rolls — allegedly taken from the estimated hundreds of thousands of immigrants from neighbouring Indonesia and the Philippines. PBS, which says the practice was rampant during the 1994 elections, recently reported to the election commission that there were still some 5,000 dubious voters on the rolls.

Police surround house seized by fugitive bank robbers

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — A gang robbed a bank in the Kenyan capital Wednesday, then hijacked a car and fled to a home where they took the family hostage. Police surrounded the house and killed one of the robbers. About 50 officers took up positions around the house, occupied by an Indian family in a west Nairobi neighbourhood, and were preparing to use tear gas to flush out the gang after firing numerous rounds at the one-storey building. The drama began at around 11 a.m. (0800 GMT), when at least 10 thieves robbed a Nairobi bank of 3 million Kenyan shillings (\$50,000) and commandeered a car. Police managed to arrest six of the thieves at the scene, but the rest escaped and occupied the house. The robbers allowed the family's housekeepers to leave, but were still holed up inside at 2 p.m. (1100 GMT), police said.

3 die as riots spread across Mauritius

PORT LOUIS (AFP) — Three people died in rioting which spread across the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius following the suspicious death of popular reggae singer Kaya, police said Wednesday. Kaya died Sunday while in police custody, sparking violence in the capital Port Louis. The rioting has spread to other areas. Schools and colleges were closed for a second day as the island prepared for Kaya's funeral in Port Louis later Wednesday. Several thousand young Rastafarians were expected at the ceremony. Meanwhile, police said cars and buses were set alight overnight as rioting continued. The army was called in early Wednesday as violence flared in the Quatre Bornes area, 15 kilometres south of the capital. The funeral of Berger Agathe, who died of injuries Monday after being hit by a rubber bullet fired by anti-riot police, passed off peacefully earlier Wednesday. Agathe, another well-known reggae singer, was a friend of Kaya. It was unknown whether the three deaths confirmed by police included Agathe. Tuesday, protesters set up barricades across the main roads linking the capital with the rest of the island. Several police stations were attacked across the island and some looting was reported. The government police unit, in the wake of the violence, island television reported, Kaya was arrested last Thursday after smoking marijuana at a rally organised by the Political Republican Movement to press for legalisation of the drug, known locally as "Gandia."

British press discouraged over 'chaotic' Kosovo talks

LONDON (AFP) — If there was a winner from the fudged Kosovo peace talks, Britain's Daily Telegraph commented Wednesday, it was surely Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

"No one has gained from the chaotic peace conference," the daily wrote in an analysis piece after the talks at Rambouillet outside Paris broke up with only an agreement by the warring sides to meet again on March 15.

"No one except Slobodan Milosevic," the paper added, "who has been given a few more weeks to kill Kosovo Albanians before there will be any more talk of unleashing NATO on him."

Ostensibly, the timespan will allow the Serb and ethnic Albanian sides to consult back home on a tentative settlement for political autonomy.

But none of the parties signed up to any deal, and the thorniest military questions, deployment by NATO peace troops in the province and the disarmament of the Kosovo rebels, remain unresolved.

The Telegraph said it was what happened "when short-term fixes are sought to ancient problems," and warned the international community to "prepare for the long haul."

For the conservative daily, the talks were a "humiliating climbdown" by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who set an ultimatum for an agreement only to see it defied.

The Times agreed, saying her reputation had "taken a beating over the past few days."

It regretted that Operation Agricola, the British codename for deployment of troops to Kosovo, had been put on

hold by such inconclusive talks.

The Guardian said the six-nation Contact Group, which organised the peace conference, was now forced to look for ways to "put the best possible face on failed talks."

It highlighted the situation among a war-weary population on the ground in Kosovo, a theme taken up by the Express Daily which quoted one Kosovar saying "If this is peace, why are they firing at us?"

The Independent, under the headline: "Triumph off the agenda for Kosovo," noted that American frustration was evident.

"Washington forgot that Kosovo was a zero sum game," the paper's analysis ran. "Just as Northern Ireland was (and in some extent still is) — where a gain from one side is invariably counted by the other as a setback."

China blasts NATO Kosovo threats

BEIJING (R) — China's Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan denounced Wednesday NATO threats of military action in Yugoslavia, saying strikes would not help resolve the Kosovo crisis.

Tang repeated Beijing's blanket opposition to the use of force against sovereign states in a meeting with Yugoslav Ambassador to China Slobodan Unkovic, and added that military action in Kosovo would violate the U.N. Charter.

"Military action is detrimental to the final settlement to the problem and would also cut the peace negotiations which have already seen certain development," Tang was

quoted as saying by the official Xinhua news agency.

"We call on the international community and all relevant sides in Yugoslavia to continue seeking ways for a political solution," he added.

NATO has geared up to carry out air strikes against Serb forces in Kosovo to end violence against ethnic Albanians.

Tension eased late Tuesday after marathon talks reached agreement to extend substantial autonomy to Kosovo.

The deal struck in Rambouillet, France, saw the Serbs accept the principle of autonomy but reject independence for Kosovo or giving it the

status of a third republic within Yugoslavia.

The result fell short of expectations raised at the start of the conference on Feb. 6, when leaders of the major powers brandished harsh words at Serbian authorities, saying they would face immediate air strikes if they wrecked the talks.

China has blasted the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) several times in recent months over its threats to intervene in the conflict.

Beijing has also opposed NATO expansion plans, painting the Western military alliance as a relic of the cold war that is grasping for a new role as a "global cop."



Indonesian students ride a parade in a convoy

Missouri executes first inmate since Pope's plea

PHIL, Missouri (AP) — A convicted murderer who sought clemency after 15 years in prison was executed Wednesday. James Rodden, 41, was the first inmate executed in Missouri since the death of killer Darrell Lewis last month. The governor, Warren Hearnes, signed the execution order. Rodden had been in prison since 1983. He was charged with the murder of a woman. The execution was carried out by lethal injection. The state's attorney general, Jay Byrum, said the execution was a "necessary step" to maintain the integrity of the justice system.

The court didn't give a reason, but many believed it was because of the Pope's visit to St. Louis. The execution date was scheduled for Jan. 29, after the Pope left St. Louis for Rome.

"Simulation is allowing the world to improve the annual meeting of the Advanc-

Hillary Clinton in the running?

By Mary Dejevsky

JUST WHEN you thought that the epic of the president, his girlfriend, his wife and their lawyers had finally played itself out, White House Pictures has come out with an inspirational cliff-hanger of an episode. Will the wronged wife take to the campaign trail on her own account? Could she take her place in the very body that voted 50-50 to remove her husband from office? Will Bill, chastened puppy-dog that he is, redeem himself by cheering her on?

In short, will Hillary Rodham Clinton run for the U.S. Senate? Without a pause to catch their breath, audiences across America are responding: "Yes, Yes and Yes! Go Girl!"

And the lady herself, the object of all this enthusiasm? When the clamour last week became too loud to ignore, she said she would think about it. Or rather, in the delicate wording of a statement issued late last Tuesday, "I will give careful thought to a potential candidacy in order to reach a decision later this year." America, agog for a new thrill after a roller-coaster year, must wait and see.

In this land of great opportunity and great projects, which agonises endlessly about the role of women in public life, there would be something both poetic and heroic about Hillary Clinton running for the Senate — which is exactly why the idea has taken wing. Back in November, when Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the venerable Democratic senator for New York State, announced that he would not stand at the next election in two years' time, Clinton's name was not mentioned. To be sure, Moynihan's seat was considered a plum for any Democrat, but it would also be hard fought. The Democrats had just wrested the second New York Senate seat from the tenacious Republican senator, Alfonse D'Amato. The Republicans, and perhaps even Mr. D'Amato himself, would be desperate to recoup the loss in 2000.

Clinton's name flashed on to the screens initially because she had been largely responsible for Al d'Amato's defeat, visiting New York repeatedly to raise funds and campaign for his Democratic rival. She had proved herself an accomplished

campaigner, not just in New York but elsewhere, throughout last November's congressional elections, raising Democrats' spirits across the country at a time when the future of her husband's presidency — through no one's fault but his own — was in serious question.

What is more, New Yorkers had embraced her with huge enthusiasm at every level: From Democratic Party donors (a crucial constituency) to immigrant taxi-drivers, to suburban housewives, Clinton was admired for her self-starting toughness, her get-up-and-go, her resilience and independence. The leading lights to the Democratic Party, among them the New Jersey senator Robert Torricelli, noted this affinity and sowed the seed of the idea. After all, New York Democrats needed a celebrity and they needed a winner, and Clinton could be both.

Clinton initially kept a judicious silence — her husband was, after all, in the middle of being impeached for lying about an adulterous relationship with a White House trainee. Perhaps in frustration, or more probably because the idea was just too delicious to pass over, the bandwagon rolled of its own accord. One seasoned commentator ventured in *The New York Times* that a "dream contest" for the Senate in 2000 would be Hillary Clinton v. Rudolph Giuliani. The tigress wife of the president of the United States versus the bulldog Republican mayor of New York City. That was it: So far as the media were concerned, the horses were already at the starting gate. Small matter that neither Clinton nor Mayor Giuliani had announced their intentions.

When Bill Clinton was acquitted last week and the Monica Lewinsky affair was consigned to the past, the Hillary-Rudy battle for New York, with its potential for glitz and personality and politics-to-the-death, filled the gap. What had begun as little more than a few quips over cocktails had developed a life of its own. Last weekend's television talk shows, which have thrived for a year on Bill and Monica, turned their attention to Hillary. With that came endorsements from all sides.

The White House chief of staff, John Podesta, surprised his interviewer by tak-

ing the question seriously and saying he thought that if she ran, she would win. So, no less surprisingly, did Pat Moynihan. A senator of the old school, who was rumoured to be not best pleased that Hillary Clinton might succeed him, and then to be miffed that she was taking so long to make up her mind, he said he thought she would be an excellent candidate and that she would win. The polls give her a margin of five points or more over Giuliani in a hypothetical contest.

Through this crescendo of wishful thinking there has been no suggestion at all that Clinton put herself in the frame for the New York Senate seat, still less that her husband put her up to it. Her political activity in recent years — with the one unhappy exception of her failed health service reform bill — has been to support her husband and Democratic candidates for Congress. Although she was known among her contemporaries at Yale as a formidable political activist on the left, she gave up campaigning on her own account when her husband first succeeded in his bid for political office in Arkansas, and became the family's main breadwinner instead.

Bill Clinton seems genuinely bemused by the prospect of his wife as senator, but by no means hostile. Answering questions from reporters during his visit to Mexico this week, he said he thought she would make "a terrific senator" if she chose to run, but that the decision had to be hers alone. He said that the thought had "never crossed her mind" before others started mentioning it, and that she had not had time to turn her attention to it — for reasons which he sensibly did not broach. He also said that if she did run, he would support her "enthusiastically" — the first tantalising hint that we could see Bill Clinton singing his wife's praises on the campaign trail next year, paying back some of the loyalty and conviction she has applied to getting him elected over more than two decades.

His ramblings on the subject were almost the first spontaneous utterances he had made on any subject after a year in which his every syllable, dot and comma seemed to have been approved by a dozen lawyers before he spoke.

By yesterday, the spinmeisters at the

White House — who know a good thing when they see one — started to play up the prospect. There was talk of how Bill Clinton saw a reversal of roles as a chance for "redemption," to make it up to his wife for all the hurt he had inflicted. More sceptical souls theorised that the togetherness of the Clintons on the mooted New York run provides a welcome carapace for them as they await some of the more gruesome sequels of the Monica Lewinsky affair: Monica's book, Monica's television interviews, Monica's promotional tour.

It is unprecedented for the First Lady to make a bid for public office — a thing none of her predecessors would have dreamt of — still less, except perhaps in the case of Eleanor Roosevelt, be qualified for. But in a revealing contribution to the question of his wife's prospects in New York, the president said that she had not yet had time to talk to the people who thought she should run, and — "perhaps more important — to those who think she shouldn't."

No one doubts Hillary Clinton's stamina or her resilience. She has demonstrated both in ample measure over the years she has been in the White House, especially in the past year. She has proved, too, her capacity to fight, and she has no weaknesses in the field of policy. Unusually for a woman, especially a woman in American politics, she has surmounted the appearance factor. People listen to what she has to say now, without first appraising her hair, her make-up or her suit.

And boy, would she need that resilience. If she chose to run, she would face unpleasant questions of a personal and political kind. There would doubtless be men, and women, who would ask whether she had "failed" as a wife. Her political skill would be called into question, especially her plans for health reform which failed, in part, because of her naiveté about the need for political consensus.

All the investigations of the past years would be revisited: the Whitewater land deal in Arkansas which lost money she invested; the spectacular gains she made on a cattle futures investment courtesy of a family friend; and the "Travelgate" affair in which she was blamed for the

disbanding of the White House office travel staff.

Despite exhaustive investigations of each of these — and the formal questioning of Clinton on her role in Whitewater — no charges have been brought. The independent prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, even conceded during the Lewinsky investigation that his other Clinton inquiries had so far turned up nothing incriminating. Even if the First Lady is in the clear, however, more of the mud may have stuck to her name than to that of her husband so far as money matters are concerned — if only because she was the lawyer and main investor in these ventures.

While this may presage a difficult and contentious campaign, there is no suggestion that Clinton would crumble. After all, what unknown horrors can a political campaign hold compared to those of learning of your husband's infidelity, detail by gruesome detail, in the full glare of the world's media?

The two bigger questions about Clinton's candidacy are propriety and winnability of a First Lady running for elected office while her husband is still president is obviously untested, but could produce tricky conflicts. Who pays for her transport and security? Is she travelling as First Lady or as candidate? What if her policy pitches conflict with those of her husband, who will be out campaigning not just for her, but for his current Vice-President, Al Gore?

The bigger question is whether Hillary can win. This winter she is riding as high as any First Lady ever. The voters, with the memory of her heroism in the Monica Lewinsky scandal fresh in their minds, are falling at her feet. Party fund-raisers see dollar signs in her eyes. Almost two years, though, is a very long time in American politics. The mood of the country could change. If it turns against her husband, it could turn against her. New York



Unusually for U.S. politics, people listen to what Hillary Clinton has to say now, without first appraising her hair, her make-up or her suit (File photo)

could drop her as capriciously as it embraced her. She lacks any local power base, and her stated support for a Palestinian state last year alienated many Jewish voters.

For an "ordinary" candidate to fight and lose would be no dishonour. But the loss to Hillary Clinton from failure could be greater. To run for New York, she would be sacrificing the other opportunities — to raise money, to earn money, to support good causes — that will come her way when her term in the White House ends. To lose in New York could reduce her "price" and limit her opportunities. It could also close two other Senate doors that might open after her husband leaves office: In her home state of Illinois and her adopted state of Arkansas.

Just this once, though, the canny and cautious Clinton might throw caution to the wind, seize the moment, and run for New York. Hillary for senator against the backdrop of the Statue of Liberty. Bill leads the cheers. What a poster, what a campaign pitch, what a race. Run, Hillary. Run!

—The Independent.

Search for alien life starts here on Earth

By Maggie Fox
Reuters

NASA'S SEARCH for life beyond the planet may stretch to Mars and Jupiter's moons, but it will start in the depths of the Earth, scientists involved in the project said on Monday.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's new Astrobiology Institute — a "virtual" institute linking 11 different labs via the Internet — has come up with its official road map for the search for life.

Laid out before a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Anaheim, California, the map shows a convoluted course that winds its way through super-hot undersea vents, deep into the frozen Antarctic and through oceans before shooting off toward Mars and Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, and beyond.

"Now we have completed a NASA road map for astrobiology," said David Morrison, director of space at the NASA-Ames Research Centre at Moffett Field, California.

"It's simply the study of life in the Universe. It is a question of what was the origin and evolution of life, is there life on other worlds, and what is the future of life on Earth and in space," Morrison told a news conference.

"The premise is that the space programme has reached a point at which we can begin to answer these questions." The Astrobiology Institute is carefully separated from the non-governmental Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute, known as SETI. NASA had launched a similar project in 1992 but

less than a year later Congress put an end to what it considered expensive foolishness.

Now the new institute has secured \$9 million for this year and \$20 million for 2000 to try to determine under what conditions life can survive and thrive, whether these conditions do or ever did exist elsewhere in the solar system, and whether earthlings can make it out there in space.

Biologists, chemists, astronomers, physicists and a range of other specialists will team up for what NASA is billing as a unique effort to answer such weighty questions.

They will study the surprising findings that creatures can live in above-boiling temperatures in places like deep undersea sulphur vents and the thermal springs of Yellowstone Park, as well as at enormous pressures deep under the Earth's surface, and in what look like frozen wastes at the Earth's poles.

"There are environments on Earth where life does not exist, but not many," said Jonathan Trent of NASA-Ames. He is most interested in the microbes and other small creatures living in the oceans, and points out that 75 per cent of the planet is covered by water.

"An unbiased exploration of the planet for life would unquestionably begin in the oceans," he said.

The possibility of oceans on Mars and Europa are what make those locations good candidates for a search for life. Mars obviously has no ocean now, but might have once, while the Galileo space mission found evidence there might be a subsurface ocean sloshing around on Europa.



All of the scientists are clear about what they are looking for, and it is not little green men (File graphics)

"There has been an estimate that there could have been as many as five habitable planets in the solar system," David Desmarais of NASA-Ames said.

Venus might have been habitable before its runaway greenhouse effect turned it into a steamy caldron, while Chiron, an asteroid near Pluto that was recently promoted to planet status, also has the potential for a liquid ocean, Desmarais said.

Jack Farmer, an Arizona University geologist whose team will help direct future Mars missions to collect soil samples, said his group will look for "an ancient fossil record for an early period of Martian history when

we think life might have been possible." All of the scientists are clear about what they are looking for, and it is not little green men.

"Our strategy for looking for life elsewhere would be exactly like looking for life on Earth," Morrison said. He pointed out that most of the species of Earth — in numbers and in mass — are microbes.

"We won't bother with these strange little creatures with legs walking about on the surface. We will look for creatures that really matter — the microbes."

For more information, the Institute has a web site at astrobiology.arc.nasa.gov

21st century movie stars to go digital

By Maggie Fox
Reuters

NO MORE artistic disagreements. No more demands for multimillion-dollar contracts or fights over top billing. The movie star of the 21st century will be a perfectly obedient computer programme, predicts an executive at Walt Disney Co.

America's scientific community got a sneak preview of this future late on Thursday — an innocuous-looking cyber-geek named Monty, which can move its cartoon character lips in anatomically correct synchronisation as it voices sentences typed live into a laptop computer.

So far the voice still sounds a little synthesised. But Eric Haseltine, senior vice-president for research and development at Walt Disney Imagineering, said computer images like Monty promised to take the movie industry into whole new dimensions.

"Simulation is allowing us to replace the real world and improve the real world," he told the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Anaheim.

'Simulation is allowing us to replace the real world and improve the real world'

Some of this is already being done. For example, scenes in the recent movie *Titanic* showing the ship from afar used computer-generated characters on the decks. "Those people would normally have been extras," Haseltine said.

Computer-generated dinosaurs were used in the film *Jurassic Park*, and a computer-generated elephant starred in *George of the Jungle*. Computer generation is often used to create virtual sets and sound effects.

But currently, a director must work with a technician to get computer-generated characters to work. With the new programme, the director can work directly with the "talent" Monty, created by Beaverton, Oregon-based Fluent Speech Technologies, can not only

speak as directed, but can emote.

"Look sad," Haseltine commanded, and Monty's lips turned down in good emulation of a human frown as it said: "I'm sad." Anger comes in degrees, either by voice command or with the touch of a computer mouse.

Haseltine said such characters would never replace real actors in the most important roles. "This kind of technology isn't about replacing what was before — it's about creating something new," he said.

"TV did not replace radio. Motion pictures did not replace theatre... Maybe a new medium will be created," he told reporters.

As if movie-themed fast-food meals, toys and comic books were not enough, those characters will one day appear on the Internet, entertaining their fans long after the film has disappeared from the cinemas, Haseltine said.

"The main character, Monty, could have a life afterward," Haseltine said. "I can take that character and put it on the Internet, put it on a CD." That would not necessarily be for purely entertainment value, he added. "A kid needing help with his homework could go to Monty and since he's already bonded with Monty, he'll

have a motivation," Haseltine said. "The kids can learn from somebody they already like." He promised it would be realistic.

"It used to be that artists had to fake it," Haseltine said. But new technology lets animators create effects that precisely mimic the real world, allowing images of animals and humans to move in completely realistic ways, images of water to reflect light according to the laws of physics, and shadows to fall precisely the way real shadows do.

With powerful new computer chips — which Haseltine points out were designed mostly to drive computer games, with their memory-eating graphics — such technology can fit into a desktop computer.

"The Steven Spielberg of the future can sit down at a computer, write the script, create lighting, makeup, wardrobe... shoot the picture... do the editing... and even the distribution," Haseltine said.

"The distinction between television and Internet and cinema is going to begin to blur." Movies will no longer be the realm of a few exalted directors. "Lots of people are going to have a voice in cinema," Haseltine said.

Of zeroes and ones

By Jean-Claude Elias

chip talk

COMPUTERS ARE digital machines, that is to say they can only process numbers. Even if you see a stunning colour photograph on the screen or hear divine stereo music coming out your PC, inside all these images and sounds are but zeroes and ones. If computers are about numbers I thought of using some this week to illustrate how far the world of personal computing has come in the past few years.

The average hard disk capacity, the main place where we permanently store programmes and any "work" we do with a PC, has grown from 10MB (megabytes, million bytes or characters) in 1985 to 6GB (gigabytes or billion bytes) in 1999. That's 600-fold! In the same period, the price per megabyte has fallen from 100 dinars to 35 fils, and that's no misprint!

The printing resolution of the best laser printer in 1987 was 360 dpi, or dots per inch, in black only. Naturally the higher the resolution, the sharper the printout. Now 1200 and 1440 dpi are common, and in full, glorious colours.

Perhaps computers' processing power and speed constitute the most impressive indicator of the dramatic evolution of the technology. From a "mere" 20 million instructions per second in 1987 for 286-PCs, we have moved up to more than one billion for a Pentium II-450 in 1999. The leap is even more important than what these figures indicate for the actual effect of one single Pentium II instruction is much superior to that of a 286-PC. The real performance has been boosted more than 500 times. As for CD-ROM drives, their speed has progressed from a factor 4, less than ten years ago, to 40 this year.

A business analyst recently wrote in an international American weekly that had the Rolls-Royce price followed the same curve as PCs, a Silver Shadow model would now cost less than one euro.

With technical characteristics developing further and further every few weeks and prices falling to incredible lows, a Pentium 450 can hardly be put in the same category as a good old 286. From the user's perspective, the difference in speed and performance while certainly noticeable, is not as spectacular as figures seem to tell us. This is because the new operating systems (Windows 95, 98, etc.) put a very heavy load on the PC and take a good part of its processing power. We may be enjoying more trendy, sophisticated applications, like the Internet, digital sound and image processing. But we are not doing it much faster than before.

Jean-Claude Elias can be reached by e-mail at jeanclaudio@nets.com.jo

Lebanon minister sees quick utility sales

BEIRUT (R) — Lebanon could begin privatisation of water and electricity utilities within months, its oil, electricity and water minister Sleiman Traboulsi has said.

Traboulsi, who said a detailed listing of assets had begun and would take only 20 days to complete, believes neither utility needs major restructuring before starting privatisation.

"Once the law is decided and promulgated, the ministry is ready," he told Reuters in an interview. "We went through the necessary preparation of human resources and the execution processes that

are necessary to privatise." "We will be ready and we are waiting only for the law," he said, dismissing estimates by financial analysts that privatisation of major state assets would take several years. "It won't take years," he said. "I think a few months."

Privatisation is high on the agenda of the government that took office in December, with the proceeds earmarked for reducing a public debt exceeding annual gross domestic product.

The precise plans are being overseen by a cabinet committee composed of its most powerful members — three of them,

including Prime Minister Salim Al Hoss, are economists and the fourth is a businessman.

The committee does not include Traboulsi although water and electricity, along with telecommunications, are the largest assets that could be put up for sale.

A draft law, which actually follows on from proposals under the previous government of Rafik Al Hariri, could face stiff political opposition. It is expected to provide for controls over the sale and subsequent supervision of the privatised services.

Traboulsi would not say how he foresees privatisation

taking place in utilities, talking only of "private participation" that might be only in parts of the business.

"The state has set up five independent water authorities that cover all of Lebanon and which are very effective," he said. "They operate on a commercial basis which will enable some of their activities to be privatised."

"We are waiting for the draft law to be approved. Once it's ready it will introduce the possibility of private sector participation if necessary," he said.

He added that the electricity ministry had "excellent" facilities that would

soon reach production of 2,100 megawatts, enough for Lebanon's needs.

"We have a draft law that will allow for the privatisation of different parts of the electricity industry," he said, explaining that production, transmission and distribution were looked at separately.

However, Traboulsi said the utility did have debts of \$1.4 billion, mainly from investment. He said the electricity ministry was tackling its best-known failure — receiving only 50 per cent of expected revenue because of loss, theft and refusal to pay.

IMF says Kuwait coping well with oil price decline

WASHINGTON (R) — Appropriate economic policies and a cushion of oil-related assets have left Kuwait well placed to cope with the impact of sharp oil price declines, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said.

The IMF's annual report of the Kuwait economy said that the macro-economic position of the oil-rich state had been improving. Inflation fell to 0.5 per cent in 1998 from 0.7 per cent in 1997 and 3.6 per cent in 1996.

"Executive directors noted with satisfaction the improvement in Kuwait's overall macroeconomic situation in 1997, particularly the low inflation rate and the strengthening of fiscal and external balances," the IMF said.

"They commended the authorities for their prudent approach toward the utilisation of the country's oil wealth, which had enabled the rebuilding of foreign assets for future generations," it added.

The IMF also urged Kuwait to step up efforts to cut subsidies and curb the growth of wages. Planned privatisation efforts would "enhance economic efficiency" and improve the restructuring of the budget, the IMF emphasised.

The IMF gave no growth

forecasts for 1999 but said the non-oil economy grew 2.0 per cent in 1998, down steeply from 3.9 per cent in 1997.

Economic growth, including the oil sector, was 2.2 per cent in 1998 and 2.5 per cent in 1997.

Meanwhile, a parliamentary study said Kuwait is expected to have an accumulated actual deficit of almost five billion dinars (\$16.5 billion) over the next four fiscal years to 2001/02.

Parliament's finance committee said "actual targeted accumulated deficit which needs to be financed is 4.992 billion dinars between the fiscal years

1998/99 and 2001/02," Al Anba daily reported.

The government, which has already ordered cuts in the 1998/99 (July-June) budget, has presented the elected parliament with an ambitious reform plan which would raise the cost of living by lifting some subsidies and increasing non-oil income through new charges.

Parliament had earlier passed a law obliging the state to refer any hikes in rates for some basic services to it, but parts of the reform plan do not fall under that requirement.

The government could move in the meantime to raise import tax on some

commodities and charges for services like airport departure tax, driving licences and increase fuel prices.

The 4.362 billion dinar 1998/99 budget carries a projected net deficit of 1.919 billion dinars and a gross deficit of 2.163 billion dinars. OPEC member Kuwait is facing economic hardships in the current fiscal year due a sharp drop in world oil prices.

Domestic debt according to official figures was 4.36 billion dinars, or 47 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), at the end of June 1998, the finance committee added.

India predicts 5.8% growth amid fiscal deficit concerns

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's economy is projected to grow at 5.8 per cent in the fiscal year ending March 31, the government said Wednesday in a survey that called for an "urgent" reduction of the fiscal deficit.

The provisional economic growth figure was higher than the five per cent posted in fiscal 1997-98 but below the government's budgeted target of seven per cent.

The ministry's economic survey for 1998-99 said growth would have been higher if not for the effect of the Asian financial meltdown on world import demand and international capital markets.

But it would still be one of the highest growth rates posted in Asia at a time when many countries are struggling to emerge from recession. It would be behind China's 7.8 per cent growth in 1998 and match Vietnam's 5.8 per cent.

The improvement on last

year's growth was attributed to a rebound in agriculture and allied sectors.

The survey sounded alarm bells about India's widening deficit, saying it was unlikely the government would stay inside the revised budget target of 5.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for the current fiscal year.

The survey gave no estimate for the final deficit, although the size of the shortfall in the nine months to December 1998 was up 77.1 per cent year-on-year at \$17.5 billion.

"With continuing shortfalls in collections of indirect taxes due to sluggish growth in industrial production and imports, it is unlikely that the year-end fiscal deficit would be contained within the budgeted amount," it warned.

The June 1998 budget had originally targeted a deficit of 5.6 per cent, but that was revised to 5.1 per cent following a readjustment in the

GDP base figure.

"There is an urgent need to improve the overall quality of fiscal adjustment ... by changing the composition of expenditure towards investment and restraining the growth in revenue expenditure," the survey said.

The survey warned the rising deficit coupled with market borrowings could lock the government into a spiralling debt crisis.

Reacting to the survey, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) president, Rajesh Shah, said it was "alarming" that almost one third of fiscal revenue was being used for debt servicing.

"The government's heavy borrowing has exacerbated a tremendous upward pressure on interest costs, as well as constraining economic activity and growth in the private sector," Shah said.

Industrial output faltered with growth falling to 3.5 per cent between April-December

1998 as against 6.7 per cent in the same period last year.

"The slowdown in industrial growth may be attributed primarily to a slackening in aggregate demand," the survey said.

"This includes factors such as falling export growth due to an overall slump in world trade compounded by an erosion in the competitive advantage of Indian exports on account of a steep depreciation in east Asian currencies," it added.

The trade deficit widened by \$7.3 billion for the nine months to December 1998, with year-on-year export growth dropping 2.9 per cent and imports rising 7.1 per cent.

"Our exports are repeatedly under attack on the part of subsidies and dumping, and therefore there is an urgent need to restructure our incentive schemes so as to make them WTO consistent," said CII President Shah.

The survey also expressed concern over the decline in foreign direct investment inflows at \$880 million in the first nine months of 1998, compared to \$4.3 billion in the same period the previous year.

India's annual inflation rate was put at 4.6 per cent as of Jan. 30 1999, down from 5.3 per cent the same time last year.

"Average inflation for the whole of 1998-99 will, however, be higher than the 4.8 per cent registered in 1997-98," the survey said.

Farming was the key factor pushing economic growth in 1998-99, with the agriculture and allied sectors expected to witness a 5.3 per cent increase in production.

The agricultural sector employs 64 per cent of India's workforce and accounts for 29.4 per cent of gross domestic product.

Exchange Rates Wednesday, 24-02-99

	1 US DOLLAR	1 EURO	1 POUND	1 YEN	1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1 HONG KONG DOLLAR	1 TAIWAN DOLLAR	1 SOUTH KOREAN WON	1 THAI BATH	1 MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	1 INDIAN RUPEE	1 JAPANESE YEN	1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1 HONG KONG DOLLAR	1 TAIWAN DOLLAR	1 SOUTH KOREAN WON	1 THAI BATH	1 MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	1 INDIAN RUPEE	1 JAPANESE YEN	1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1 HONG KONG DOLLAR	1 TAIWAN DOLLAR	1 SOUTH KOREAN WON	1 THAI BATH	1 MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	1 INDIAN RUPEE	1 JAPANESE YEN	1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1 HONG KONG DOLLAR	1 TAIWAN DOLLAR	1 SOUTH KOREAN WON	1 THAI BATH	1 MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	1 INDIAN RUPEE	1 JAPANESE YEN	1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1 HONG KONG DOLLAR	1 TAIWAN DOLLAR	1 SOUTH KOREAN WON	1 THAI BATH	1 MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	1 INDIAN RUPEE	1 JAPANESE YEN	1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1 HONG KONG DOLLAR	1 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Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

'It is illogical to have 11 agricultural ministers within a period of 15 years'

** ACCORDING TO Kheir Eddin Shukri, board chairman of the Jordanian society which groups producers and exporters of fruits and vegetables, the most important requirement necessary to improve the marketing of produce is for the government to financially support the Agricultural Marketing Organisation (AMO). He said the organisation's budget does not suffice its administrative requirements although the AMO employs a large number of qualified personnel.

The chairman also highlighted the need to formulate a mechanism to implement the AMO's law and to immediately implement the five decisions issued by the organisation as they would have a major effect on organising this important sector (the five decisions were not specified in the report). "The agricultural product belongs to the farmer until it reaches the border where it becomes the property of the state and is exported under the name: Jordanian products," he said.

Finally, Shukri stressed the importance of adopting a clear and fixed agricultural

policy to improve the performance of marketing process. "It is illogical that eleven ministers take the agricultural portfolio during 15 years," he exclaimed.

Asked about the main issues that the society is following up he mentioned the specifications and standards of boxes and other packaging matters which have importance in organising the sector. Another issue concerns allowing foreign refrigerated trucks returning from the Saudi border to load Jordanian produce to European markets because of the lack of suitable Jordanian trucks to carry out the task.

Shukri concluded by saying that the society is contacting the concerned parties to establish a permanent exhibition for fruits and vegetables where it would be possible to sell directly to the consumers in order to lower prices on the public and achieve rewarding income for the producers. The exhibition, he indicated, would open the opportunity to exporters and importers to promote the produce locally and abroad (Al Dustour).

Islamic Bank posts JD4.4m net profit

** THE JORDAN Islamic Bank for Finance and Investment posted a JD4.4 million net profit in 1998, 40 per cent higher than the net profit registered in 1997. Board Chairman Mahmoud Hasoubeh said the board of directors has recommended to the general assembly the distribution of JD2.2 million in dividends at a rate of 10 per cent. The bank's retained earnings from 1997 total around JD2 million.

Hasoubeh said the bank's total assets at the end of last year amounted to JD706.8

million, JD56 million more than the 1997 total. He added that the bank's financial investments amounted to JD481 million and that the profit from mutual investment increased by JD3.5 million to JD34.4 million.

Noting that the bank last year completed raising its capital to JD22 million, Hasoubeh indicated that the shareholders' equity stood at JD50.25 million at the end of 1998. Total deposits reached JD596.6 million, JD44.7 million higher than the figure in 1997 (Al Arab Al Yawm).

Oil supply slowdown cannot save 1999 price

LONDON (R)—A slowdown in oil supply growth is not coming fast enough to prevent an even deeper price crisis for oil producers this year. A Reuters poll of industry experts has found.

Asian economies are too depressed to siphon off a substantial global stock glut and suffering producers will have to cut more output just to get prices back to last year's sunken level, the pundits said.

A survey of 20 top analysts forecast an average of just

\$12.61 a barrel for international benchmark Brent this year — even less than last year's 22-year low of \$13.34.

The latest outlook is a downward revision of nearly a dollar from a similar survey in December after Brent's brief January rally above \$12 has quickly tailed off.

Mild winter temperatures have now switched the spotlight back on export group OPEC, whose November failure to further its 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd) output cut

package condemned Brent to single digits for the first time in 12 years.

"Our \$13 prediction is based on an assumption that OPEC will some time this year cut actual production by up to another million bpd," said Mike Barry of London's Energy Market Consultants.

"They've got to enforce the existing agreement in full and cut another 500,000 bpd. If they don't prices are heading even lower," he added.

Almost all agreed that OPEC

will have to cut again at some point in 1999 as the social impact deepens from their shrunken oil revenues.

But any new cut at the group's March 23 meeting will hinge on resolving Saudi-led disaffection with Venezuela and Iran over their poor compliance with existing curbs.

Iran's dispute over its production allocation can only be resolved by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's March visit to Saudi Arabia.

And while new Venezuelan

President Hugo Chavez' instincts lead him towards further cuts, many expect him to yield to pressure to open the taps.

Industry consultants were more pessimistic than banks about the chances of a price pick-up, forecasting on average \$11.87 for this year.

Yet OPEC may find some comfort as the price crash closes unprofitable output, in the North Sea and especially the United States and Canada.

"The fact is that \$10 oil is just not sustainable for a long period of time," said Mehdi Varzi of Dresdner Kleinwort Benson Bank. "We're already seeing supply growth curtailed and the number of rigs actually in operation has virtually halved."

Most analysts now expect a trifling 100,000 bpd of supply growth outside OPEC this year, less even than a 200,000 bpd gain in 1998.

But it will take at least another year for swinging budget cuts now being made by oil firms to take their full toll on swollen crude supply.

In the meantime demand growth is not strong enough to drain the mass of spare oil in world storage tanks.

Asia — before last year the engine for almost all oil market growth — is showing only the first shoots of a recovery, with economists particularly downbeat about demand in regional giants Japan and China.

A further downturn in Brazil would tarnish demand prospects still further. Philip Verleger of PKV Associates cautions that prices could average well below \$10 in the notoriously weak second quarter.

Much again rests on Iraq, whose 700,000 bpd increase in exports over the course of last year wrecked the cutback efforts of its OPEC fellows.

Iraqi exports under the U.N.'s oil-for-food programme have almost entirely escaped disruption from renewed hostilities with the U.S. and Britain since late last year.

All-out conflict could yet cut Iraqi exports altogether and send prices skyward at a stroke. But Washington's increased cooperation with a \$300 million U.N. repair programme is more likely to swell Iraqi exports still further this year.

The outlook for 2000 is slightly stronger. Expectations of further deceleration in non-OPEC supply growth and a slow rebound in Asia's economic fortunes push Brent to a forecast average of \$14.47.

Yet some analysts also believe that the possible fall-out from the "millennium bug" could give prices a sudden lifeline at the turn of the year if failing computers scythe supplies.

"You just cannot quantify what sort of impact there is going to be from the Y2K bug," said Peter Bogin of Paris-based Cambridge Energy Research Associates. "But the psychological impact as we head towards December 31 could well lift prices as people just won't know what surprise might be round the corner," he added.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1999

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There are several squares in effect today. That's when the moon or a planet is at 90 degrees to another one, causing a blockage in the energy pattern. Today, we're going to have one in communications and hard work. Something you say is likely to be misunderstood, or a job might have to be done over again. Be careful.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Pay attention not only to what you're doing, but also to what the other people are doing. Your intuition should be excellent right now. You can also trust your education. Skills you've been learning recently can be put to good use. Don't wait until you've got the credentials. Go ahead and try the theory.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Today could be a challenge, and not just for you. Looks like it starts out with a breakdown in communication. This is not all that unusual, actually. But today, you might be amazed to see how big a gap there is between what was said and what was heard.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) Things that were easy yesterday could go awry today, so don't take anything for granted. Make sure the people helping you understand what they're supposed to do. A breakdown in communication would be the most likely cause of an accident or glitch in the work schedule. Not your fault, but why get into it if you don't have to?

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Proceed with caution today. A simple misunderstanding could get blown out of proportion. If there's money involved, it's even more likely to happen. Best not to sign any contracts today for just that reason. You could be thinking the contract says one thing, while the other guy thinks it says something completely different.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Looks like somebody has pinned their hopes and dreams on what you can provide. Not to worry. You're very good at what you do. Go ahead and accept the applause as readily as you do your own criticism. Take credit for something you've done well and don't be the slightest bit nervous about it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You're probably about ready to let your hair down. Just be careful where and when. You don't want to go out of character in front of the wrong audience, and you sure don't want to make fun of somebody you were just kissing up to. That's always in poor taste, and today it could cause you to lose everything you've recently gained.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Finish old stuff today, rather than beginning new. Looks like there's going to be a stumbling block that you can't really plan for. As you know, the only difference between a stumbling block and a steppingstone is perspective. You can turn this to your advantage, but it might take a little thought. Apply that thought earlier rather than later.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You have an interesting weekend ahead of you. Take extra care to go over every step of your agenda carefully. Check everything on and off your list. Ask others if everything that needs to be done has been done, then follow up and make sure.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) You could come up with a brilliant idea today, something so obvious you wonder why you didn't think of it years ago, and it's so crisp, so clear, so appropriate, you might even be able to patent this gizmo, market it and make a fortune. If there's any possibility that it could really happen, definitely write it down.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You could get a bonus today, but be careful. If you spend it on something that's good for the home and family, you'll prosper. If you spend it on anything else, you won't. That's all there is to it, so don't squander your resources on things that won't last, or even on worthy causes.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) There appears to be a fly creeping into the ointment later today. Hopefully it's not something broken that has been fixed, and costs more than you thought it would. But that could happen, so be careful, especially around machinery. You probably ought to take your car in for an oil change.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1999

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You've got a grand trine in water signs, which brings out your gentle, nurturing side, if you happen to have one. If not, you could get irritated when conditions like these are in effect. It seems like everybody's being really wimpy. A little of that goes a really long way with you, but today, try to be nice. It'll be good for you.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Some things you tried yesterday that didn't work will go shockingly awry. You didn't really waste that time. It was useful, but perhaps for reasons you hadn't expected. Isn't it strange the way that happens? Well, no point in wondering about why. Just go ahead and push while you've got the advantage.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You might get a raise today, or a better job. You've probably already done the work to establish yourself as an expert in the field. Now, all you need to do is let other people know that you want to be rewarded. You'll get away with being a little aggressive. You might even get a standing ovation for tooting your own horn.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) Yesterday was a struggle, but today should go smoothly. Looks like you've set things up to take advantage of an opportunity, and that's exactly what will happen. You not only have the talent necessary, but you also have friends in high places. One in particular is going to give you a boost that could push you over the top.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Looks like quite a bit of money could be riding on how you handle a tough situation. It won't be enough that you do your job well. You'll also have to be nice about it. Politeness is almost worth more than accuracy right now. So don't argue. The positive impression you make now could benefit you in more ways than you can imagine.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) You hardly ever play hooky, but today the temptation is great. If you could start your weekend early, that would be perfect. If not, a long lunch hour may have to do. In any case, conditions are perfect for playing, and a new game is suggested. You could turn out to be a natural at something you've never done before.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) This is a good day to advance in your career, and if you're going to do it, be nice. Look nice, smell nice, dress nice and act nice. Being pleasant will get you more points than just about anything else. This can't be phony nice, either. It's got to be genuine. They'll be able to tell.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Today your bread will land buttered side up. You'll find a parking spot right in front of the store and the cop behind you on the freeway is actually after the guy in front of you. Don't waste this wonderful day on trivia, think of something magnificent you want to achieve, and make a start on it.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Money is not a topic you like to have your head full of, but every once in a while you have to think about it, and this could be one of those times. You have skills that are definitely marketable, and some probably aren't being marketed right now. There's an opportunity out there; all you have to do is find it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Today's focus is on the areas of partnership, friendship and education, so you'll be meeting new people, making new friends and possibly even forming new partnerships. Your relationships can help you do your job better. Somebody out there would really like to play with you, and it would make your life easier to let that happen.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You could get more money for the work you do, especially if you put together a good case. You'll have to prove to the boss that you're generating income and you require a larger percentage. It's not going to be that hard to do, because it's probably true. Give it a try. The celestial influences are in your favour.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) This is one of your best days all year. You've got luck in love, travel and self-esteem. You're looking good, feeling great, saying the right thing at the right time, doing everything perfectly. You're wise, generous, warm, loving, considerate, thoughtful. You know what else? You're appreciated. Bask in it.

Germans spend billions on vacations

STUTTGART, Germany (AFP) — Germans are among the "biggest-spending" tourists in the world, having paid out around 42 billion euros (\$49 billion) on their vacations last year, the head of a tourism trade show here has said.

The amount of cash Germans spent abroad in 1998 was six per cent more than they had spent in 1997, said the director, Walter Gehring.

The top destination for holidaymakers from Europe's biggest economy was Spain, which played host to 8.3 million Germans last year, an increase of 7.3 per cent over the previous year.

Other favourite vacation spots were, in order: Italy (5.7 million Germans), Austria (4.2 million) and France (2.4 million).

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Blatter backs down on World Cup plan

GENEVA (AFP) — FIFA President Sepp Blatter has backed down on plans to hold the World Cup finals every two years.

Blatter said Wednesday that he would not put his controversial proposal to the next executive committee meeting of football's world governing body, which is scheduled for Zurich on March 11-12.

Blatter said he would hold further meetings with UEFA chief Lennart Johansson, with whom he held discussions Wednesday morning, before making any further push for the switch.

"Before examining the possibility of moving the World Cup to every two years we need to put in place an international calendar that everyone agrees on," Blatter said.

There has been widespread opposition to Blatter's idea, which he first unveiled late last year.

Blatter now admits that various continental championships would need to be rescheduled before any consideration can be given to a World Cup every two years.

Johansson said he was pleased with Blatter's move. "We appreciate the fact that Blatter came personally to put forward his plans," Johansson said.



FIFA President Sepp Blatter (R) touches his head as he is flanked by UEFA President Lennart Johansson during a press conference in Geneva on Wednesday. The UEFA forced Blatter to back down on his plan to stage the World Cup every two years but Blatter still hopes it will happen in the long-term (Reuters photo)

He added that Blatter realised that he had made a mistake by talking to the press about his World Cup proposals instead of letting the football community know first what he had in mind.

"UEFA is still not convinced about changing the timetable of the World Cup, but at least we have now got a base for constructive dia-

logue," Johansson said.

By withdrawing his plan to change the frequency of the World Cup, Blatter has avoided a showdown in Zurich with his executive committee, where Johansson controls the majority of votes.

But Blatter still hasn't completely abandoned hope of eventually convincing world football of the merits

of his idea.

"The secretary generals of all the International Football Confederations are going to hold regular meetings in a bid to try and unify the international calendar," Blatter said. "There is a willingness of behalf of everyone to find a solution and I hope that agreement will be reached within 18 months."

Brazil, France still top FIFA rankings

PARIS (AFP) — Latest FIFA rankings published Wednesday:

1. Brazil	827
2. France	786
3. Croatia	742
4. Italy	742
5. Germany	738
6. Argentina	732
7. Czech R	727
8. Netherlands	716
9. Spain	706
10. Romania	698
11. England	695
12. Mexico	688
13. Norway	676
14. Sweden	659
15. Denmark	653
16. Yugoslavia	649
17. Portugal	641
18. Austria	631
19. Morocco	629
20. Chile	614

Lakers sign Rodman

VANCOUVER (R) — Basketball bad boy and seven-time NBA rebounding champion Dennis Rodman became a Los Angeles Laker on Tuesday night, the team announced.

Rodman, 37, was expected to practice with the team Wednesday and make his Lakers debut Friday at the forum against the cross-town Clippers.

"I welcome him to the team," said Lakers guard Kobe Bryant.

"I think it will create a spark. He'll be fine. He'll fit in."

It's going to be nice. I think a good experience to play with him."

The signing of Rodman to a one-year contract with a player option for the 1999-2000 season was made official following a 93-83 loss at Vancouver, the Lakers' third defeat in three days on the road.

Los Angeles could have used his rebounding and defensive presence, as it was outscored 49-41 and let Vancouver score 30 points in the paint.

Rodman will make about \$468,000, or about \$12,000 per game for the Lakers' remaining 39 games in the lockout-shortened regular season.

Los Angeles had only the \$1 million 10-year veteran's minimum available to pay him under the NBA's current salary structure, and that was

pro-rated for games remaining.

Rodman had more or less confirmed he would sign a day earlier when, in a weepy, rambling press conference, he complained: "No, I'm not happy with the contract. It's about minimum wage for the league and the taxes will be about \$200,000."

The Lakers waited to make the announcement until after Tuesday's game because of league roster rules.

Rodman made \$9 million last season, when he helped the Chicago Bulls win their third straight championship — and his fifth title overall. But teammates as focused as Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen admitted he at times tested their focus with his bizarre behaviour, sometimes flouting team rules.

During the NBA finals, he skipped practice to appear on a wrestling programme.

He represents a huge gamble for a Lakers team that is a disappointing 6-6 despite having superstar Shaquille O'Neal at centre and the brilliant 20-year-old Bryant now starting.

A number of teams including the Orlando Magic and Miami Heat had been in the running for Rodman's services, but for the past couple of weeks it had appeared

that the mysterious player would either play for the Lakers or nobody.

At Monday's news conference, Rodman — flanked by his actress wife Carmen Electra and wearing two diamond rings in his pierced nose and one on his upper lip — had been asked if he was being selfish in holding out against the Lakers for two weeks. Tears welled in Rodman's eyes.

"You call me selfish. Last year I gave \$1 million to charity. I give my all on the court, but no matter what I do for this league or the game of basketball I can never win in situations like this. I am never going to win with you people," he said.

In addition to his Chicago "three-peat," Rodman won titles with the Detroit Pistons in 1989 and 1990. He has averaged 7.5 points and 13.2 rebounds in his career, which includes a two-year stint with the San Antonio Spurs.

Rodman also has been suspended six times in the last seven years, including twice by the league, and once kicked a cameraman in the groin.

Gebrselassie to attack record book

TOKYO (AFP) — Ethiopia's Haile Gebrselassie will lead assaults on World Athletics records in what is expected to be the biggest-ever field at the World Indoor Championships in Japan next week, organisers said Wednesday.

There will be at least 10 defending champions, including Gebrselassie who aims to reestablish himself as the fastest man over 3,000m indoors at the March 5-7 championships in Maebashi, north of Tokyo.

The field is expected to reach 719 athletes from 123 nations, topping the 712 athletes from 118 countries at the last indoor championships in Paris two years ago.

The committee was still waiting for official replies from 39 nations, including the United States, Italy and Kenya, although the deadline for individual entries passed on Tuesday.

The U.S. delegation is to be named after the national championships on Friday and Saturday.

But the organisers are anticipating a record participation on the basis of preliminary entries.

Gebrselassie, who holds the world outdoor records for 5,000 and 10,000 metres, aims to crack the 3,000m indoor mark of 7min 24.90sec set by Kenyan arch-rival Daniel

komen a year earlier in Budapest.

The 25-year Ethiopian set a world indoor record of 12:50.38 for the 5,000 metres in Birmingham last week.

Also among the early entries is Cuban Ivan Pedroso, gearing up for a fourth straight men's long-jump title, while Maria Mutola of Mozambique is aiming to go for a fourth in a row in the women's 800-metre dash.

Cuban high jumper Javier Sotomayor, who holds the world's outdoor record, will aim to regain the title he won in 1989, 1993 and 1995.

Gebrselassie, who holds the world outdoor records for 5,000 and 10,000 metres, aims to crack the 3,000m indoor mark of 7min 24.90sec set by Kenyan arch-rival Daniel

Youngsters lead Rockets past Sonics

HOUSTON (R) — Youngsters Cutino Mobley and Othella Harrington took over for their more famous elders down the stretch, combining for 20 points in the fourth quarter as the Houston Rockets took a 98-86 victory over the Seattle SuperSonics on Tuesday.

Future hall of famers Scottie Pippen and Hakeem Olajuwon scored 19 points apiece but combined for only six in the final period, when the Rockets pulled away.

Mobley, a rookie second-round pick, scored 13 of his season-high 19 points in the fourth quarter. Harrington, a third-year player who has replaced injured superstar Charles Barkley in the starting lineup, added seven of his 17.

"I had some tough calls against me early but I was able to stay focused to help us in the second half," said Harrington, who made 7-of-10 shots and leads the NBA in shooting percentage. "It's great to be back on the winning track and have confidence again."

"I wanted to break out and I needed one of these games," said Mobley, who added six rebounds and five assists. "I wanted to get in there and hopefully get some more respect in the league."

Pippen and Olajuwon grabbed 10 rebounds apiece for the Rockets, who improved to 4-0 at home.

Gary Payton had 26 points, 10 assists and seven steals for the Sonics, who have gone 1-2 against Western Conference powers Utah, Los Angeles and Houston over the last four days.

In Vancouver, the Grizzlies defeated the weary Los Angeles Lakers for the first time in franchise history, 93-83, because Shaquille O'Neal hit his free throws

down the stretch and Shaquille O'Neal did not.

The Grizzlies had been 0-12 against Los Angeles, but with the Lakers playing for the third consecutive night, were able to maintain a lead throughout the fourth quarter.

Rahim scored 28 points and had 14 rebounds and three assists. He had eight points in the final period and went 6-of-7 from the foul line in the final 1:39.

O'Neal had 26 points but missed 3-of-6 free throws in the fourth quarter. O'Neal grabbed 10 rebounds and dished out seven assists for the Lakers, who were winless in a three-day trek to Seattle, Denver and Vancouver.

In New York, the Knicks held the New Jersey Nets to a 26 per cent shooting rate and a stifling 82-74 victory.

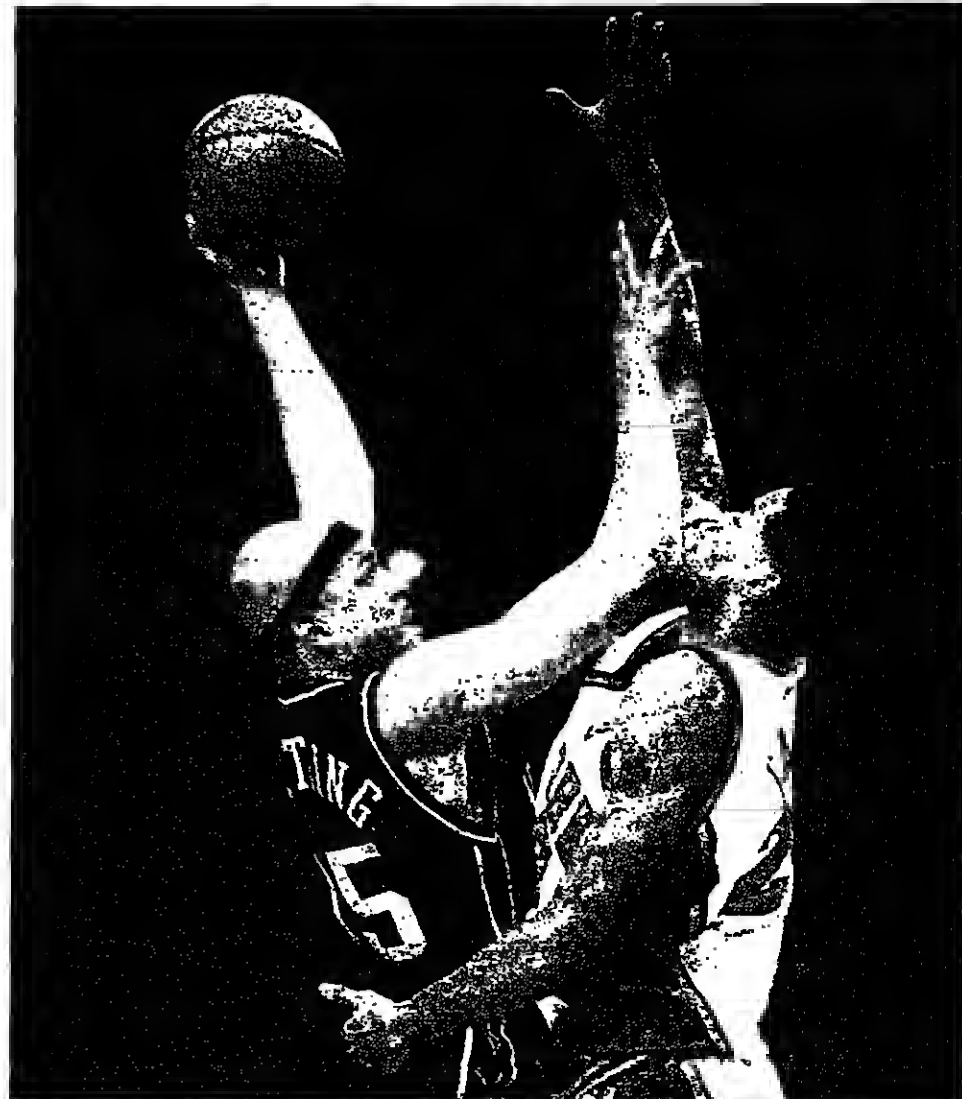
Patrick Ewing had 20 points, 11 rebounds and seven blocks for New York, which has won seven of eight games since losing swingman Latrell Sprewell to a fractured heel.

In Washington, 35-year-old Terry Porter scored 10 of his 16 points during a pivotal five-minute stretch of the second half and the Miami Heat won their sixth straight game, 96-80 over the Wizards.

Signed as a free agent just before the season, Porter has done a good job providing offence in the absence of injured starter Voshon Lenard. Porter is averaging 10.7 points per game off the bench.

Alonzo Mourning had 29 points, 12 rebounds and five blocks and Tim Hardaway added 20 points and eight assists for Miami.

At Detroit, 35-year-old Joe Dumars scored eight of his 16 points in a decisive third-quarter run as the Pistons shook off the worst offensive



Chris Gatling of the New Jersey Nets (L) tries a hook shot against the outstretched arm of Marcus Camby of the New York Knicks (R) in second quarter of game at Madison Square Garden in New York (AFP Photo)

performance in franchise history with a convincing 106-80 victory over the Raptors.

Grant Hill added 14 points, a team-leading nine rebounds and 10 assists for the Pistons, who had lost six of their last seven games, including Sunday's 85-64 debacle at San Antonio.

In Chicago, Glenn Robinson's slicing dunk with 4.3 seconds left snapped a tie and lifted the Milwaukee Bucks to a 90-88 victory over the Bulls.

Ron Harper's last-chance layup was off the mark as the Bulls fell to 2-9 overall and 0-5 at home.

Robinson finished with 24 points and Ray Allen and Dell Curry added 16 apiece for the Bucks, who beat the Bulls for the second time this season after losing 11 in a row dating to the 1994-95 season finale.

In Dallas, Michael Finley made sure the Mavericks did not blow a 17-point second-half lead, hitting two crucial jumpers and a pair of free throws in the final 81 seconds of an 89-85 victory over the Atlanta Hawks.

Finley scored 16 of his 22 points in the second half. Mookie Blaylock scored 22 points for Atlanta but

missed his last four shots in an 84-second span late in the game.

In Los Angeles, Bimbo Coles and John Starks combined for 18 points in the fourth quarter and each made free throws down the stretch as the Golden State Warriors kept the Clippers winless with a 94-89 victory.

Starks finished with 18 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds, while Coles scored 15 points. Golden State has won five of its last six games after an 0-5 start. Last season, the Warriors did not record their fifth win until the 21st game.

Kipketer confirmed for indoor championships

MONTE CARLO (AFP) — Wilson Kipketer, the world record holder and world champion in the 800 metres, on Wednesday confirmed he will compete in the IAAF World Indoor Championships in Maebashi, Japan, next month.

The formidable Kenyan-born Danish athlete not only won the 800m indoor title in Paris two years ago but also set two new world records for the distance, with a mark of 1min 42.67sec in the final demolishing the 1:43.96 he clocked in the heats.

He will be one of the great attractions of this year's championships, which will be contested from March 5-7. Kipketer caught malaria whilst on holiday in his native Kenya just over 12 months ago. His recovery has been long and difficult, but his iron will and determination helped him overcome the residual effects of the sickness and make a sensational return to the track when he clocked 1:43.74 in Monte Carlo in August last year and 1:43.18 in Zurich just four days later.

Kipketer slumped, however, at the European Championships in Budapest, where he finished last in the final with a time of 1:50.13. This result convinced the world record holder to interrupt his season and to undergo further detailed medical tests.

He believes a spell of winter training in Australia has put him in good shape for Maebashi.

Hiddink axed by Real Madrid

MADRID (AFP) — Real Madrid's Dutch coach Guus Hiddink was sacked after a board meeting of the Spanish club in the early hours of Wednesday morning, club president Lorenzo Sanz said.

"The team team is not working," Sanz said. "I don't know if it's the fault of the coach or the players. I think everyone could be at fault but at the end of the day it is always the coach who pays for defeat."

The Real Madrid bosses paradoxically made their decision following a 1-0 victory against racing Santander sealed a semi-final place in the Spanish Cup.

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch (R) is seen with his wife and daughter after the closing ceremony of the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan.

Two Australia after Olympic

Two Australian athletes are expected to return home after the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. The athletes are a pair of brothers, who were both members of the Australian national team.

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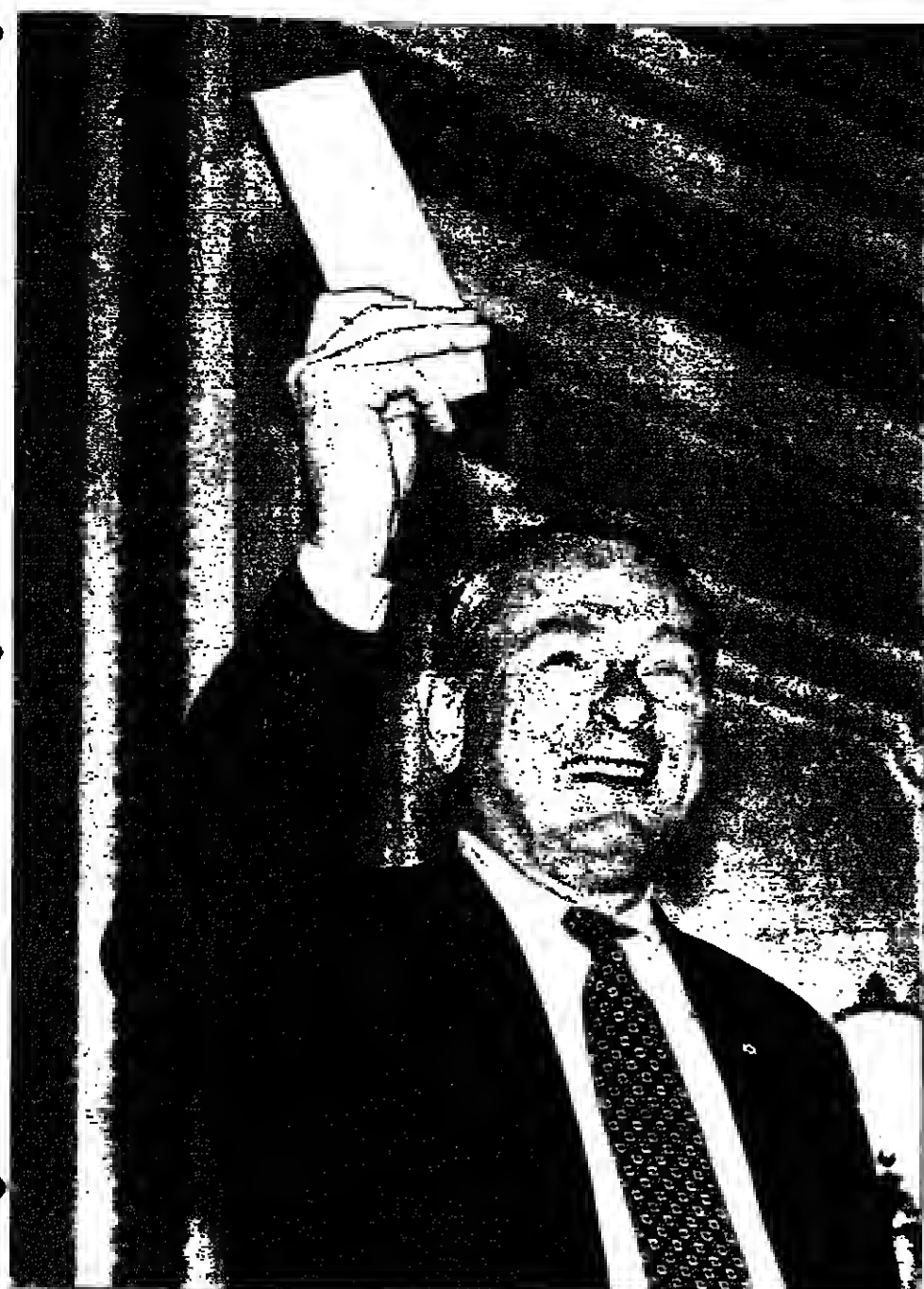
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Rodman



International Olympic Committee Vice President Dick Pound holds up a gift that was presented to him after speaking at a luncheon for the Canadian Club in Ottawa, February 23. Pound said that IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch should not step down from his position despite pressure over the Olympic bribery scandal (Reuters photo)

Two Australians on fraud charges after Olympic village raid

SYDNEY (AFP) — Two men appeared in court here Wednesday charged in connection with an alleged A\$8 million (\$5 million) tax fraud involving Sydney's Olympic village and other major construction sites.

Company director James Soong and accountant Edward Pearce were arrested following simultaneous raids by 30 Australian federal police and tax investigators on the Olympic village and five other projects.

Bank accounts were frozen and assets seized including cars and a conference centre in South Australia, a federal police spokesman told AFP.

"We have a conference centre outside Adelaide and a number of motor cars including a Rolls Royce," he said, adding police were seeking global restraining orders for property allegedly owned by Soong in several countries.

The raids followed a six-month investigation of 30 companies allegedly controlled by Soong.

A significant percentage of the tax fraud allegedly relates to work at the Olympic village.

Soong and Pearce both faced three charges of defrauding the Commonwealth of Australia and Soong was also charged with one count of organised fraud under the proceeds of crimes act.

Neither made any plea when they appeared before a Sydney magistrate and were released on bail of half a million dollars each.

Federal police spokesman Stephen Simpson said officers with search warrants moved simultaneously on the building sites including the Olympic village on Tuesday.

"But we were not required

to use the search warrants at the Olympic village where we entered at the invitation of the personnel present," he said.

The construction workers' union released a statement claiming abuse of the taxation system is rife in the construction industry and allegations relating to the Olympic site contractor are the tip of the iceberg.

Abuse included workers wrongly classified as subcontractors therefore paying much lower tax rates than pay-as-you-earn workers, and employers making payments for overtime or other allowances, union secretary John Sutton said.

"There is massive abuse of the tax system in the construction industry," Sutton said. "The tax office's interest in this industry is long overdue."

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Forest offer trial to Argentine defender

LONDON (AFP) — English premiership struggler Nottingham Forest are giving a trial to Argentinian right back Hector Luis Gordano, they announced Wednesday. The 23-year-old plays for Rosario central, the former club of derby county star Horacio Carbonari, and is also a target for Spanish side Espanyol.

Hill may quit Formula One — Jordan

LONDON (AFP) — Damon Hill could quit Formula One at the end of the season if he does not have a successful year with Jordan, his team boss Eddie Jordan said Wednesday. "How long Damon can go on? I don't know. If he does a good job for us, we'll want him to stay. If he doesn't, he'll want to stop himself," said Jordan, who has teamed hill with Heinz-Harald Frentzen for the new campaign, which begins in Australia next month. Jordan added: "He'll be strong enough to make that decision. If things are getting too rough and on top of him he would be the first to come to us and say 'I'll go at the end of the year'." Hill, 38, made history when he racked up Jordan's first and only Grand Prix win in Belgium last year, leading home his then teammate ralf schumacher. It was his 22nd Formula One race win. He won all his other 21 — and the world drivers' championship — with Williams.

Middlesbrough keep Branca's career on hold

LONDON (AFP) — Middlesbrough are still refusing to allow their Italian striker Marco Branca to resume his career — despite another positive fitness report. It was reported Wednesday. Branca returned to the club this week claiming he was fit to resume playing after just 20 minutes of action in the last nine months. His career had been put on hold in October when Middlesbrough's orthopaedic consultant ruled a severe knee problem would no longer stand up to the rigours of professional football. Branca, 34, has had a glowing report from a consultant in the United States, who claims the player is strong enough to resume playing. But Boro refuse to sanction his return until he has visited a consultant in Cambridge — which they insist was the course previously agreed with the player and the professional footballers' association. Club spokesman Dave Allen said: "We've had a medical opinion which says Marco's knee is unstable, and the opinion of our consultant is that it won't stand up to the stresses of football." "We advised Marco of this in October and invited him to get a second opinion. In view of what's at stake we feel he should follow the course of action everyone previously agreed, and that is to go and see Dr. Dandy in Cambridge. "We look forward to receiving his opinion on Marco's knee," Allen told Clubcall.

Around alone yacht race set for jury room battle

AUCKLAND (AFP) — After surviving the brutal southern ocean and a dramatic rescue of French yachting star Isabelle Autissier the fate of the around alone yacht race is set to be determined in a jury room in Uruguay, race organisers said Tuesday.

There is also a growing sea of acrimony over Autissier's continued presence on board the yacht of her rescuer, Italian Giovanni Soldini. As Soldini now closes in on French rival Marc Thiercelin there is debate about whether Autissier is making a difference.

Both men have rounded cape horn.

Class one in the third leg of the race, from Auckland to Punta Del Este in Uruguay, has been reduced to two boats, Soldini and Thiercelin. Last week overall leader Autissier hit disaster when her yacht capsized.

Thiercelin said he could not turn back to her because of gear-failure on his yacht while Soldini managed to reach her and rescued her.

In an e-mail from race headquarters in South Carolina Organisers again congratulated Soldini "on his seamanship and courage in effecting a quick and safe rescue of Isabelle Autissier."

"The committee feels that the decision on whether to proceed to Punta Del Este or transfer Isabelle to another vessel or land, if or when it is prudent to do so, must be Giovanni's in consultation with Isabelle," they said in the statement.

"It is clearly understood by both Giovanni and Isabelle that he must continue to sail his boat single-handed and without any help from her in any aspect of routing strategy or boat handling."

An international jury would be convened in Punta Del Este to decide what compensation Soldini should receive for assisting Autissier.

"Members of the race committee will consult with Isabelle and the designer of her yacht as soon as a meeting can be arranged in an attempt to understand how the capsizing occurred and why the boat could not be righted," the statement said.

The jury's decision is likely to seal the fate of the overall race which has only one more leg after the current one.

It is important as Thiercelin has lost most of the 740-kilometre (400 nautical miles) lead he gained during last week's drama. Soldini was 183 kilometres (99 miles) behind a struggling Thiercelin.

The Frenchman Monday made a pit stop in Tierra Del Fuego to repair his damaged gooseneck.

But when he got back on the course he found himself in bad winds and head seas which prevented him going through the strait of Le Maire and instead forced him east and outside Staten island.

He is now in a windless hole while Soldini, who rounded Tuesday, is sailing in good winds.

9th Pan-Arab Games officially named 'Al Hussein Games'

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — Jordanian officials have welcomed the decision by the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Ministers to name the upcoming 9th Pan-Arab Games in Amman after His Majesty King Hussein.

The council announced their decision at the conclusion of the two-day annual meeting in Algiers, where they also agreed to increase financial aid to the Kingdom to help it prepare for the Aug-15-31 Games.

"This is an honour and a sign of appreciation to the late King, and Jordan. His Majesty had done so much for youth and sports. He was a true athlete," Jordan Olympic Committee (IOC) Vice-President Mouaffaq Al Fawwaz told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

The 9th Games will be called 'Al Hussein Games' as a token of appreciation by Arab ministers of youth and sports and the entire Arab youth and sports family, for the late King's honourable humanitarian and national efforts," the council's executive committee noted.

Since the Arab Sports Federation (ASF) advanced the date of the upcoming Games to 1999 instead of 2001, the Council of Arab Youth and Sports Minister's increased aid to the Kingdom to enable it to prepare infrastructure and update sports facilities.

In the past couple of months, Jordanian officials have been exerting increased efforts to acquire as much support as possible. Aid from the Arab League has been raised to \$500,000, while the Council of Arab Ministers will grant \$200,000.

Sponsorship for Jordan's bid will be garnered through lowering the 50 per cent ASF margin of profit on promotion and television coverage.

The Jordanian government has earmarked JD18 million for the event including the construction of a multipurpose indoor stadium with a capacity for 7,000 spectators; an Olympic-size swimming pool; a track and field stadium, in addition to acquiring and upgrading facilities with electronic timing machines and other needs.

The rest of the venues would be utilised at private universities and educational institutions that have already expressed readiness to host some of the events.

At the opening of the 24th annual meeting, presided by Egypt's minister

of higher education, Dr. Mufeed Shihab, the participants stood a minute's silence in mourning for King Hussein who died Feb. 7 after a seven month struggle with cancer.

Commemorating King Hussein's contributions and efforts for the Arab Nation and mankind was Daw Sweidan, the Arab League's Assistant Secretary General who gave the opening speech on behalf of Arab League Secretary General Dr. Ismat Abdul Mejid.

According to Jordanian officials, 25 facilities, including three sport cities, have been finalised to include 27 events for men and 19 for women.

More than 15 countries and over 3,000 athletes and officials are expected to participate in the Games.

Lebanon which hosted the 8th Pan-Arab Games last summer, received \$28 million from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to help in the construction of sports facilities destroyed during the civil war.

The Amman Games will be followed by the first Arab Paralympics.

The Pan-Arab Games have only been held eight times: Alexandria in 1953, Beirut in 1957, Casablanca 1961, Cairo 1965, Morocco 1985, Damascus 1992 and Beirut 1997.

Japan's Sugiyama crashes at first hurdle

PARIS (AFP) — Japanese No.1 Ai Sugiyama crashed at the first hurdle at the \$520,000 Paris Indoor Open here on Wednesday when she went down 6-1, 3-6, 6-1 to Spain's Virginia Ruano-Pascual.

The usually ice-cold 23-year-old Sugiyama was never able to find her rhythm and she was lucky to escape a warning when she threw her racket to the ground in frustration after surrendering the 30-minute first set.

The Japanese player, who gave eventual finalist Venus Williams a run for her money in a tight second-round match in Hanover last week, was badly let down by her serve and made a score of unforced errors on the tiny annexe No. 1 court at the Coubertin Stadium.

Although she appeared to climb back in the driving seat when she went 3-0 clear in the second set, she came under renewed pressure from the nagging baseline accuracy of Ruano-Pascual and went to pieces again in the third.

She finally handed the 90-minute match to her 25-year-old opponent when she carelessly blasted a round-arm overhead over the baseline.

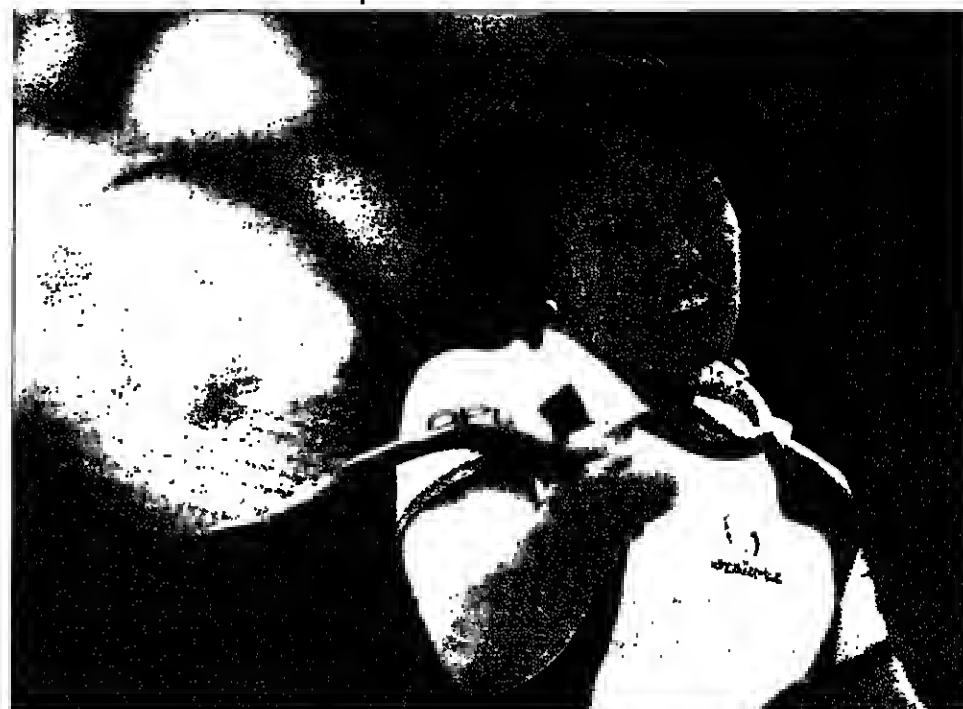
Ruano-Pascual now faces last year's runner-up and third-seed Dominique Van Roost of Belgium for a place in the quarterfinals.

Earlier, Croatia's Iva Majoli made a winning start when she defeated Elena Tatarkova of the Ukraine 7-5, 6-2 in 69 minutes.

Majoli, the French Open champion in 1997 and a runner-up here three years ago when she was the world's fourth-ranked player, was clearly relieved to have scored her first win of 1999.

After first round defeats in Tokyo and Hanover, Majoli is currently struggling to stay in the top 30.

She now plays Nathalie Dechy of France for a place in the last eight.



Martina Hingis

Hingis denies playing Mauresmo will be a 'grudge' match

PARIS (AFP) — World No. 1 Martina Hingis reached a possible quarter-final showdown with Amelie Mauresmo of France at the Paris Indoor Open on Wednesday and quickly denied that there was any bad feeling between the two.

Hingis, who scored a sharp 6-1, 6-1 victory over Yugoslav qualifier Sandra Nacuk in just 41 minutes to reach the last eight, said that her remarks about mauresmo's physical appearance and self-confessed homosexuality before the two met in the Australian Open final had been taken out of context.

"It was just a joke but it was misunderstood and turned into a big thing," said the Swiss teenager, who was reported to have claimed before winning the title that playing Mauresmo would be like playing "half a man."

"She is a very talented player and she can do what she likes in her private life," said Hingis.

"Of course on court everyone wants to win. And if we play here I think it will be a very interesting match. But we have no reason to be enemies. Perhaps you want us to put on boxing gloves?"

she grinned.

In her first match since her triumph in Tokyo, Hingis looked supremely confident. And once she had pocketed the first set with the cheekiest of drop shots, she never looked back.

Nacuk, an 18-year-old qualifier who is currently ranked a modest 123rd, had looked impressive when she put out home player Sarah Pitkowski in the first round.

But against the world's top player and in front of a packed and noisy Coubertin stadium crowd, she clearly suffered stage fright and was unable to adapt to the top seed's changes of pace and direction.

"Obviously I'm very pleased. I think I played really well," said Hingis, a

winner here two years ago.

"It was a perfect first match for me and I definitely think I am on track to win here again."

asked what she had been doing in recent weeks, Hingis replied: "I have been shooting a publicity film — and I got my driving licence. Now I can drive on my own. It's great."

After a moment's reflection she added: "But I don't think I would want to try driving here — especially around the Arc de Triomphe."

Before reaching a quarter-final clash with Hingis on Friday, Mauresmo first has to beat compatriot Laurence Andreto and then Slovakia's Karina Hahsudova.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMARA HIRSCH
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A SPOT TOO MUCH

North-South vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
♠ K J 3
♥ Q 5 2
♦ K 8 5 3
♣ 10 2

WEST
♠ 7 6 5 4 2
♥ 8 7 6
♦ 4
♣ K 9 6 4

EAST
♠ 10 8
♥ K J 10 3
♦ J 10 8 7 2
♣ 4 7 5

SOUTH
♠ A Q 9
♥ A 8
♦ A 8
♣ A Q 8 3

The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1NT Pass 2NT Pass 3NT Pass 4NT Pass
5NT Pass 6NT Pass 7NT Pass

Opening lead: Seven of ♠

We have often written about the importance of spotcards. Change one card in the West hand with either North or South, increasing its worth by one pip, and six no trump must fail. Which are the cards involved?

South's first two bids showed a balanced hand of 23-24 points.

North's jump to four no trump was invitational, and South accepted on the strength of the good five-card club suit. A heart lead would inevitably have been the contract's death knell, but we too would have led a spade from the West hand.

An obvious exchange that will defeat slam is the nine and ten of clubs. Now declarer must lose two club tricks and has no way to come to 12 tricks. The other is the eight and nine of hearts; follow the play to learn why.

Declarer won the opening lead in dummy with the jack and led a club to the jack and king. West persevered with a spade, again taken on the table. Declarer cashed the ten of clubs, came to hand with the ace of spades on which East duffed the jack of hearts, then ran three more club tricks.

East had no problem with the first two discards, parting with a card in each red suit. On the last club East could not let another diamond go, so was forced down to a bare king of hearts. When North's fourth diamond did not sort up, declarer led a heart to the ace, and the nine of hearts was the fulfilling trick. But what if declarer held the eight and West the nine? Little things mean a lot!

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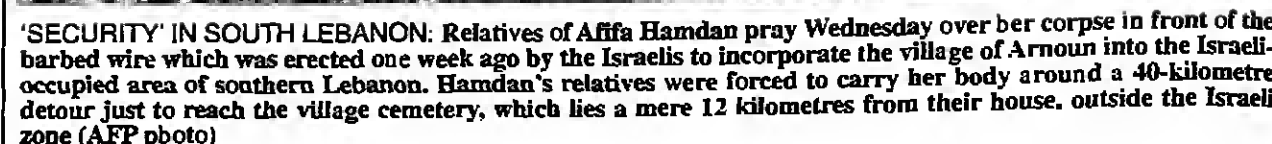
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In a sweeping 21-page ruling that upholds the government's

to deport the eight since 1987, alleging that the PFLP is "an

such as the PFLP does not justify deportation unless the fund-raisers specifically intend-

dence of plans to commit criminal or "terrorist" acts.



'SECURITY' IN SOUTH LEBANON: Relatives of Affa Hamdan pray Wednesday over her corpse in front of the barbed wire which was erected one week ago by the Israelis to incorporate the village of Arnoun into the Israeli-occupied area of southern Lebanon. Hamdan's relatives were forced to carry her body around a 40-kilometre detour just to reach the village cemetery, which lies a mere 12 kilometres from their house, outside the Israeli zone (AFP photo)

ANKARA (AP) — Former Premier Necmettin Erbakan, challenging government restrictions on his political activity, said Wednesday he will run for parliament in national elections April 18. Erbakan said he planned to run as an independent in the central Anatolian city of Konya, a stronghold of the Islamist movement where his chances of winning the seat would be good. It was unclear whether the national electoral board would accept the 72-year-old politician's bid. In January 1998, he was barred from being a member of a political party for five years, but there was debate on whether he can run as an independent.

Uniformed scouts and a group of six-and seven-year-olds struggled to be coordinated callistically while still keeping up with the parade while others carried the giant oranges and bananas which are the

job at the 50-
its current gov-
opposition to
Erakat added:
old, the world's
y that towns are

The concert was held at the Hani singer's home in Tens, expected to be a stadium.

Thursday by Egyptian crooner Shaker, one of the most popular in the Palestinian territories. Tens of thousands of Palestinians are expected to attend his concert in Jericho, organisers said.

supplied from before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

...down the door of her
house at dawn and started fir-
ing.

Most of Syria's weapons are Russian-supplied from before the collapse of the Soviet

...down the door of her
house at dawn and started fir-
ing.